AMERICAN CERAMICS 3/3

PHILADELPHIA: NOVEMBER 3–DECEMBER 1, 1984

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The Ceramic Art Quarterly
Volume 3, Number 3

Publisher: Harry Dennis
Editor: Michael McTwigan
Art Director: David Dunkelberger
Advertising Designers: Douglas Frueh and Lucy Cossentino
Design Consultant: Massimo Vignelli

American Ceramics (ISSN 0278-9507) is published quarterly by American Ceramics, 15 West 44 Street, New York, NY 10036. (212) 944-2180. Printed by Lew A. Cummings Co., Inc., Manchester, NH. Distributed in the US by Bernhard DeBoer, Nutley, NJ; distributed in Europe by Editions Olizane, Geneva, Switzerland. The opinions expressed in American Ceramics are those of the authors specifically and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the publisher.
Single Copies: $5
Subscriptions: Four issues: US $20. Canada add $5. Outside US & Canada add $20 (air mail). Foreign payments must be in US currency payable on a bank in New York City.
Address Change: Address changes should be reported to the magazine with both old and new addresses. Include address label when possible. Allow six weeks for change to become effective.
Manuscripts: Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The publisher and editor assume no responsibility for the loss or damage of such material.
Editorial and Business Office: American Ceramics, 15 West 44 Street, New York, NY 10036. (212) 944-2180.
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(Cover) Detail of Plate (1983), 24″ *(60 cm) long. Collection Daniel Jacobs, New York. Courtesy Ree Schonlau Gallery, Omaha. Photo: P. Drickey.*

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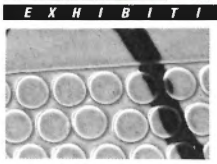

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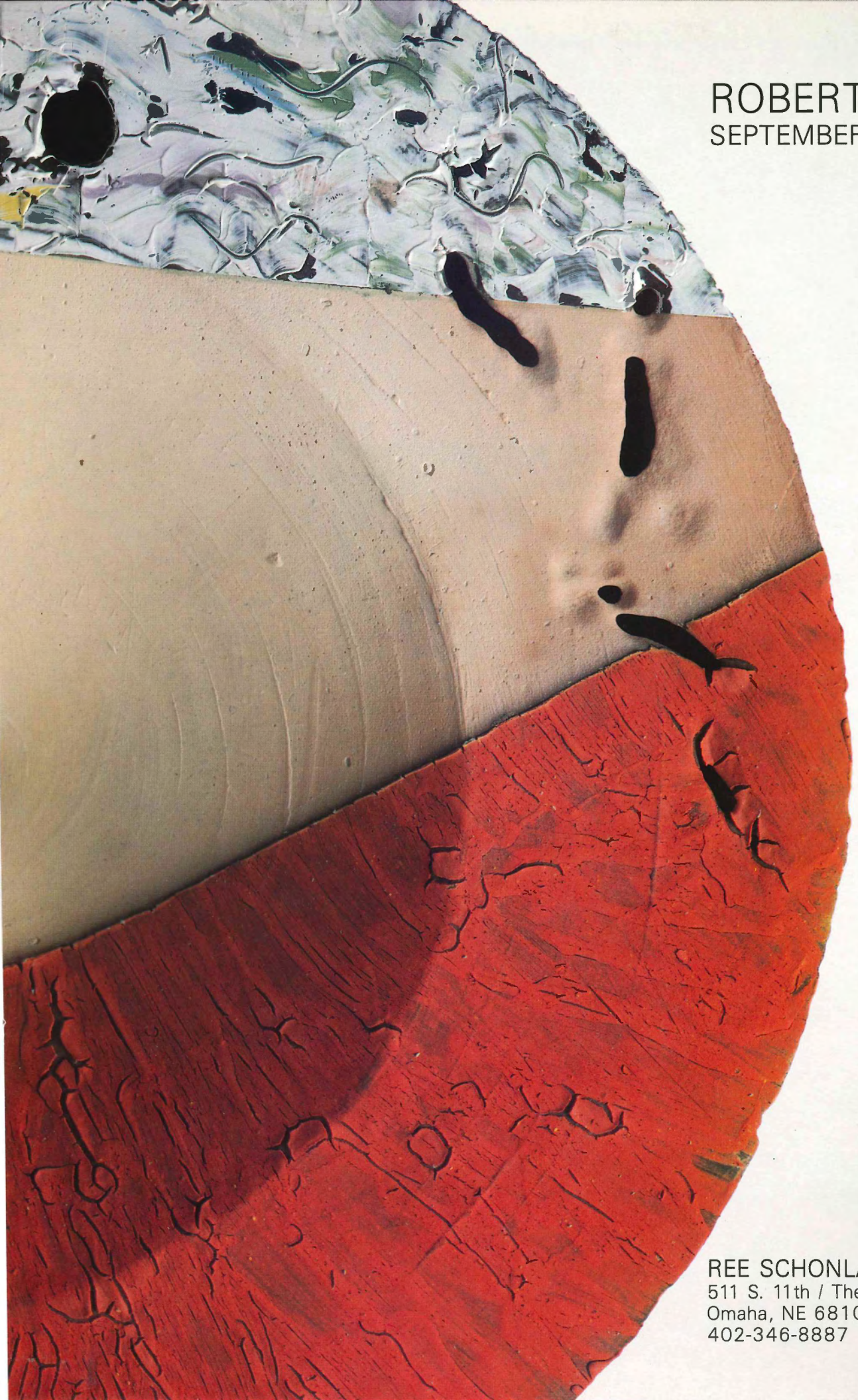

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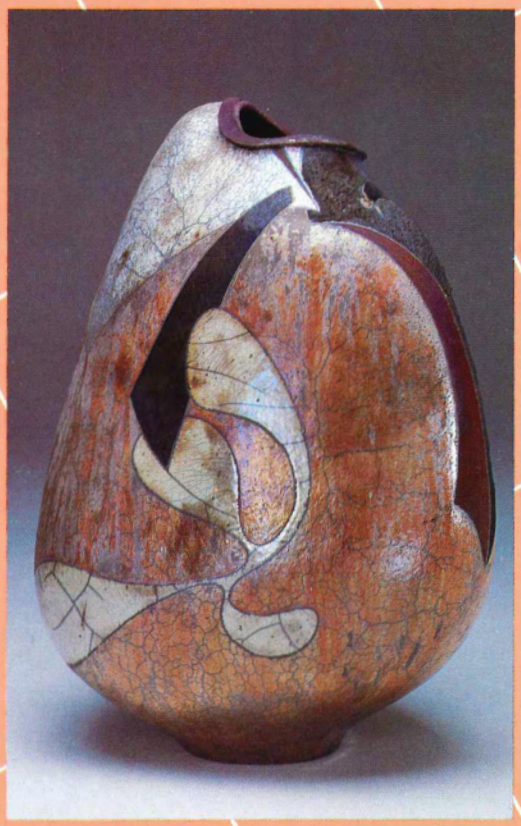

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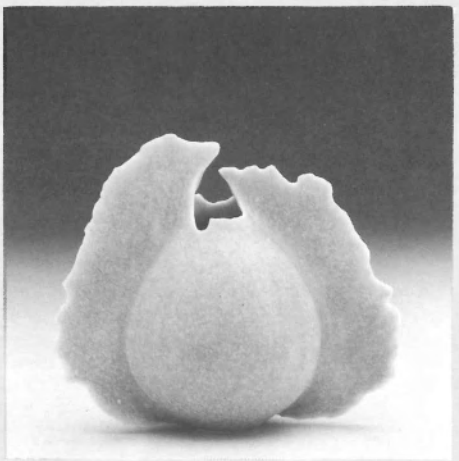

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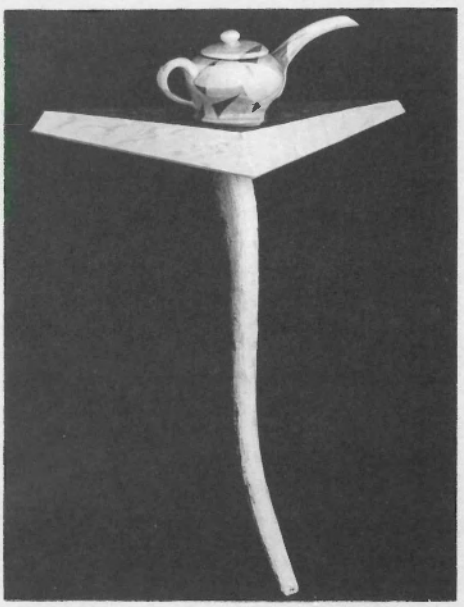

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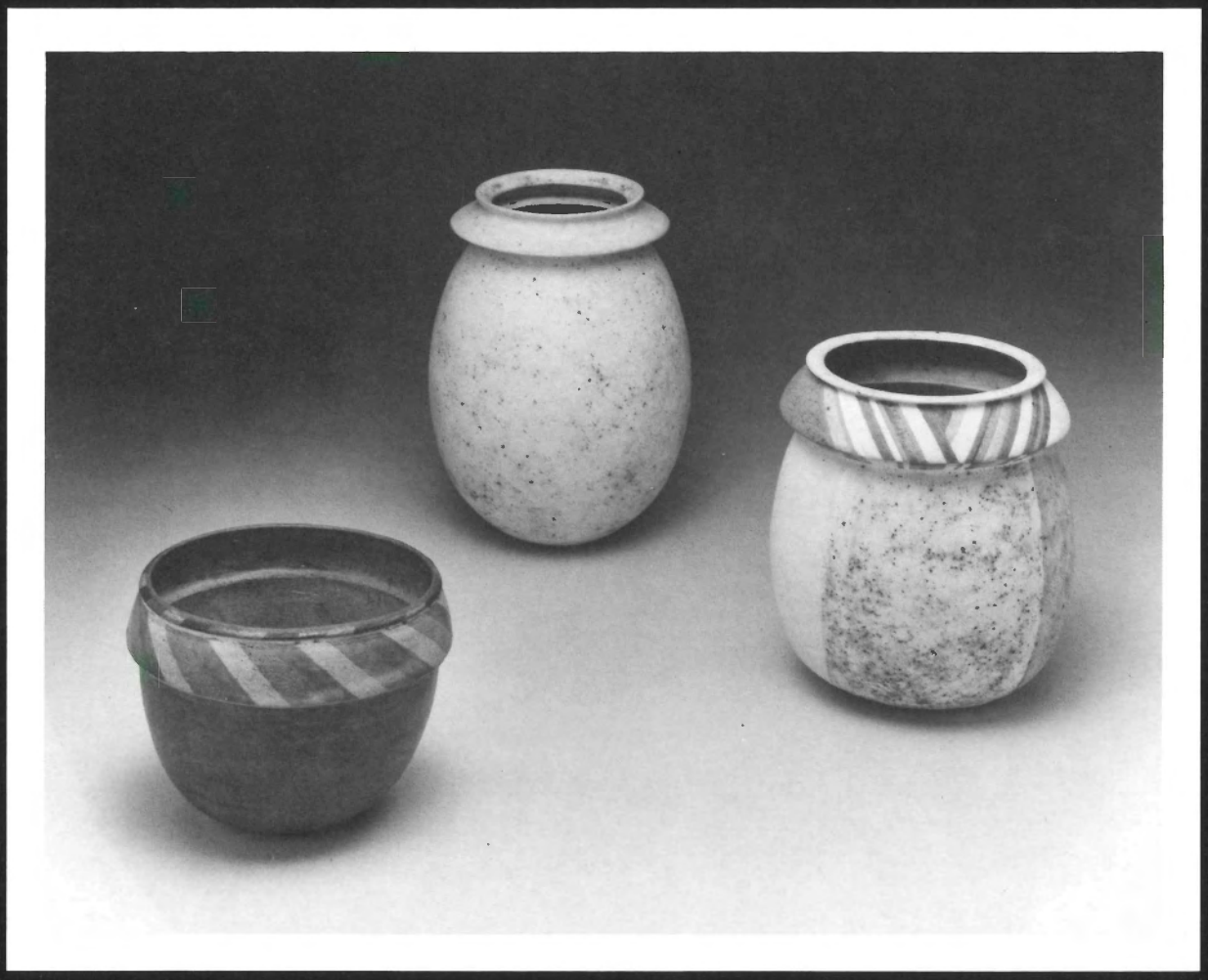

Elizabeth Fritsch, England (1974, 1977, 1976: left to right), tallest vessel 9″ high

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Tall Tales: Ken Little's Portraits of the West

Ed Forde

A petrified man was found some time ago in the mountains south of Gravelly Ford. Every limb and feature of the stony mummy was perfect, not even excepting the left leg, which has evidently been a wooden one during the lifetime of the owner—which lifetime, by the way, came to a close about a century ago, in the opinion of a savant who has examined the defunct. The body was in a sitting posture and leaning against a huge mass of croppings; the attitude was pensive, the right thumb resting against the side of the nose; the left thumb partially supported the chin, the forefinger pressing the inner corner of the left eye and drawing it partly open; the right eye was closed, and the fingers of the right hand spread apart. (!) This strange freak of nature created a profound sensation in the vicinity, and our informant states that, by request, Justice Sewell or Sowell of Humboldt City at once proceeded to the spot and held an inquest on the body. The verdict of the jury was that "deceased came to his death from protracted exposure," etc. The people of the neighborhood volunteered to bury the poor unfortunate, and were even anxious to do so; but it was discovered, when they attempted to remove him, that the water which had dripped upon him for ages from the crag above, had coursed down his back and deposited a limestone sediment under him which had glued him to the bed rock upon which he sat, as with a cement of adamant, and Judge S. refused to allow the charitable citizens to blast him from his position. The opinion expressed by his Honor that such a course would be less than sacrilege, was eminently just and proper. Everybody goes to see the stone man, as many as 300 persons having visited the hardened creature during the past five or six weeks.
—Mark Twain, *Territorial Enterprise*

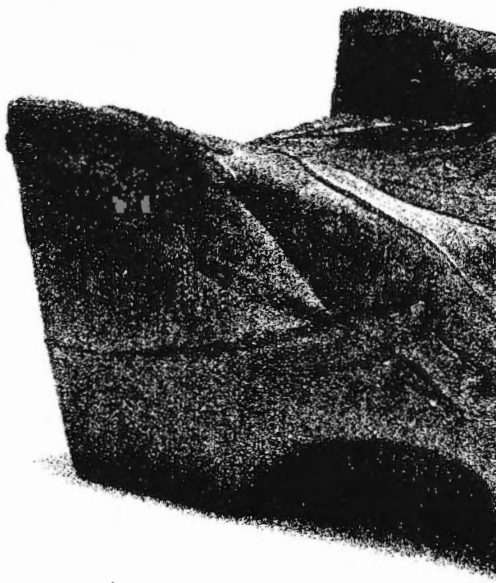
Ken Little is an artist who has been shaped by his Western origins. Born in Canyon, Texas, he has lived and worked almost his entire career on the western plains. He was educated in Texas and Utah, and has taught at universities in Montana, Oklahoma, and, briefly, Florida. He is very much a product of "Western" culture: cowboy hats, pick-up trucks, tall tales about local heroes and other characters, and imaginary animals like the Jackalope, half jackrabbit, half antelope. The arsenal of Little's images and mediums includes all elements of his environment: straw, clay, leather, cowboy clothes, old cars, animals, and more. The character of his sculpture is similarly Western in flavor. There is the "school" of Western art, from Frederick Remington to the current picturesque genre of landscape and cowboy and Indian art. But for all the obvious references in his work, Ken Little is a Western artist who does not make Western genre art.

A recent retrospective of Little's work, organized by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Wisconsin, encompasses the past decade of the artist's imagery and is appropriately entitled, "Shattered Portraits and Unlikely Heroes." This show offers incisive autobiographical portrayals of the artist, his family, and idealistic visions of his environment. The represented works cover three general stylistic approaches: the earliest mixed-media organic installations, the figurative pieces covered in shards and other surface techniques, and the largest animal sculptures.

The earliest installation pieces are very ambitious. They include a wide range of shapes and forms and many different materials and references that aspire to complex statements about a variety of meanings. These pieces developed from the refuse and squalor that surrounded the artist's studio in a run-down neighborhood in Tampa, Florida. They attempt to project a spiritual order from visual chaos. Works like *First Situation with Hay* (1973–74) place organic natural clay forms in a forest of different materials and objects: rope, straw, water, and candles. Within this enigmatic structure there is an altar surrounded by organic shapes like fossils, or geometric ones in states of metamorphosis. The hay and other substances allude to all natural elements in an almost unlimited catalogue of artistic devices. Little is experimenting with any and all of his ideas in this sort of "nature of materials" approach that seems much influenced by the work of Eva Hesse and Robert Morris.

In the context of his later sculptures, the early situational works seem atypical, almost out of place with Little's emergent visual style, that of figure and surface. However, these early works possess a spiritual presence that is at the heart of his artistic statement. In an excessive and somewhat derivative way, all these tactile materials, the organic and referential forms, and the cumulative sensations of their environmental constructs cohere to form a spirit that is akin to the action of portraiture. Little has pursued this spirit throughout his career.

It is too simplistic to draw the most obvious analogies between these first works and the influences of a Western boyhood: rope, leather, hay, and other materials—a pantheism of natural elements akin to American Indian belief. For despite these affinities, Little's formal models are the process and environmental artists of the late sixties and early seventies. His concerns are theirs: spatial awareness, the nature of materials, and the synergy of

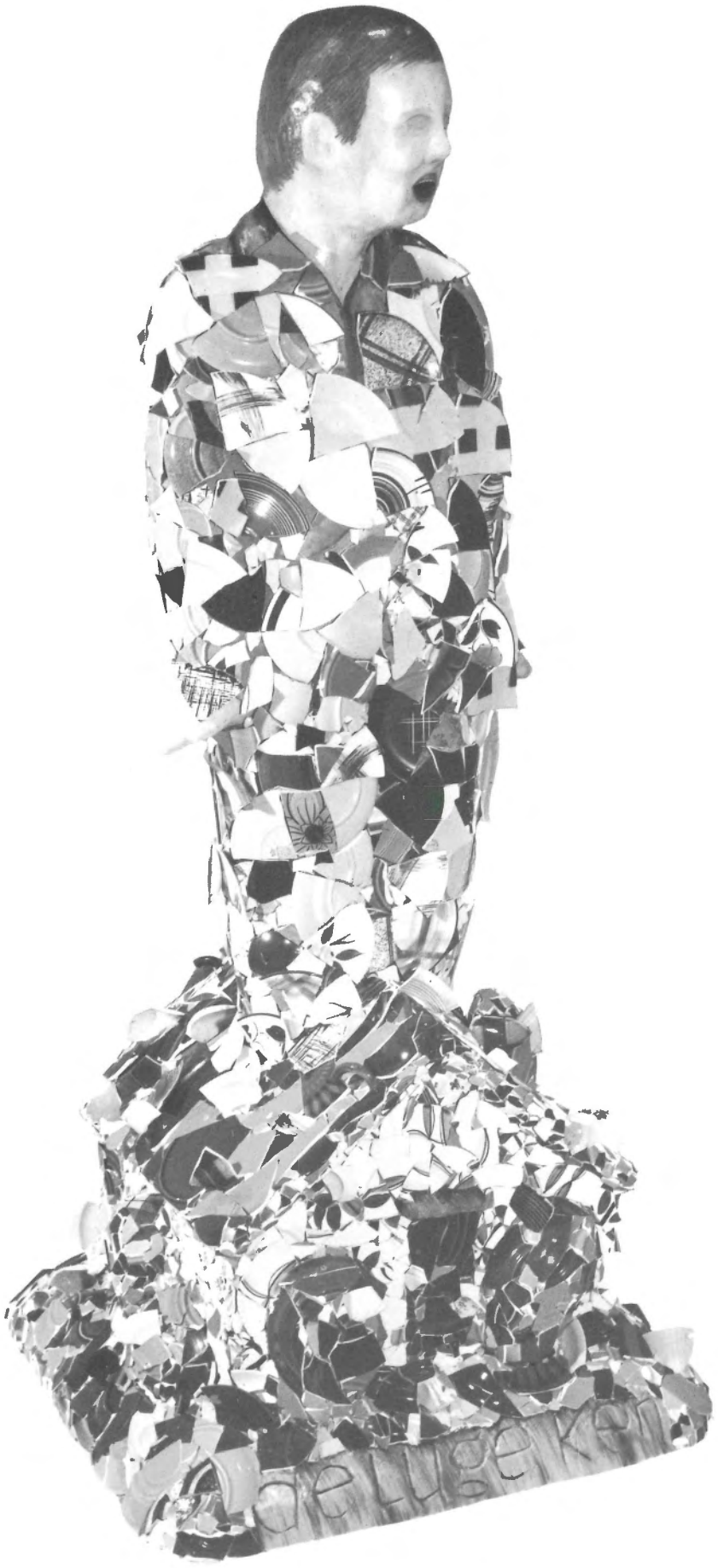


individual elements combined toward a greater effect. These early sculptures establish the artist's propensity to work on a larger scale and to present his imagery as tableaux.

Little began his artistic career as a painter—a china painter of brightly colored decorations on ceramic plates and figurines—and his formative attraction was to color and surface decoration. He built his art-making talents methodically through the initial resolution of formal relationships in his mixed-media situational series, then in the application of his first love, painting, to various-sized human and animal forms in his works from 1978 to 1981. The transition to these figures was gradual (just as the early organic shapes evolved through stick-figure animals into solid-bodied forms) and was accompanied by the introduction of colored surface decoration. Through this natural artistic growth, Little became bolder and gained the confidence to attempt his stronger personal vision—autobiographical figurative sculpture. Initially, these figures were less than life size, brown in color, with subtle, small fragments of broken ceramics spread carefully over the forms. These embedded fragments engender many empathies. The shattered pieces of pottery create rhythms of movement and serve like small, bright moments in the larger and darker side of our private lives. Eventually, these figures grew to full size and became boldly decorated with rich, oil-painted designs and explosive applications of bright, broken ceramics. Little's work had come full circle; he became a born-again china painter.

The later pieces from this series are truly sophisticated figurative sculptures. Images have been reduced to single forms: standing people, busts, animals. What these figures lack in accessories is more than compensated for by the visual complexity of the surface decoration. Little has heightened his painting techniques and encrusted his forms with broken plates and cups. The work is stunning. There is a dramatic rhythm in the texture and presence of these figures; a saturated palette of primary colors is complemented by the illusory three-dimensional effect of the broken ceramics floating over the form's surface.

Fury *(1983), 56″ x 31″ x 90″ (140 x 77.5 x 225 cm), clothing, ties, baseball gloves, leather, paint.*



These works are poignant depictions of personal friends and histories. *Submarine* (1978), for example, which shows a man seated in a canoe, clinging to the sides, alludes to a boating accident in which the artist was capsized in his canoe and swept downstream. The contrasting colors and surfaces capture the light and darker memories of this adventure. *West Texas Trilogy (Onward Christian Soldiers)* of 1980 is a ghostly, life-size assemblage of three boys in a boat. The boys, named "Kinken," "Marken," and "Joken," refer to Ken and his two brothers Mark and Joe. "Marken," a jazz musician in real life, has a piano fastened to his head. The eerie tone and composition of this sculpture suggests the complex sibling relationships in the artist's family. Pieces like *Boom* and *Fit to Kill* show a new mastery of formal presentation, but the indication of Little's new direction lies in the applied footwear that sneaks onto the bases of these later figures.

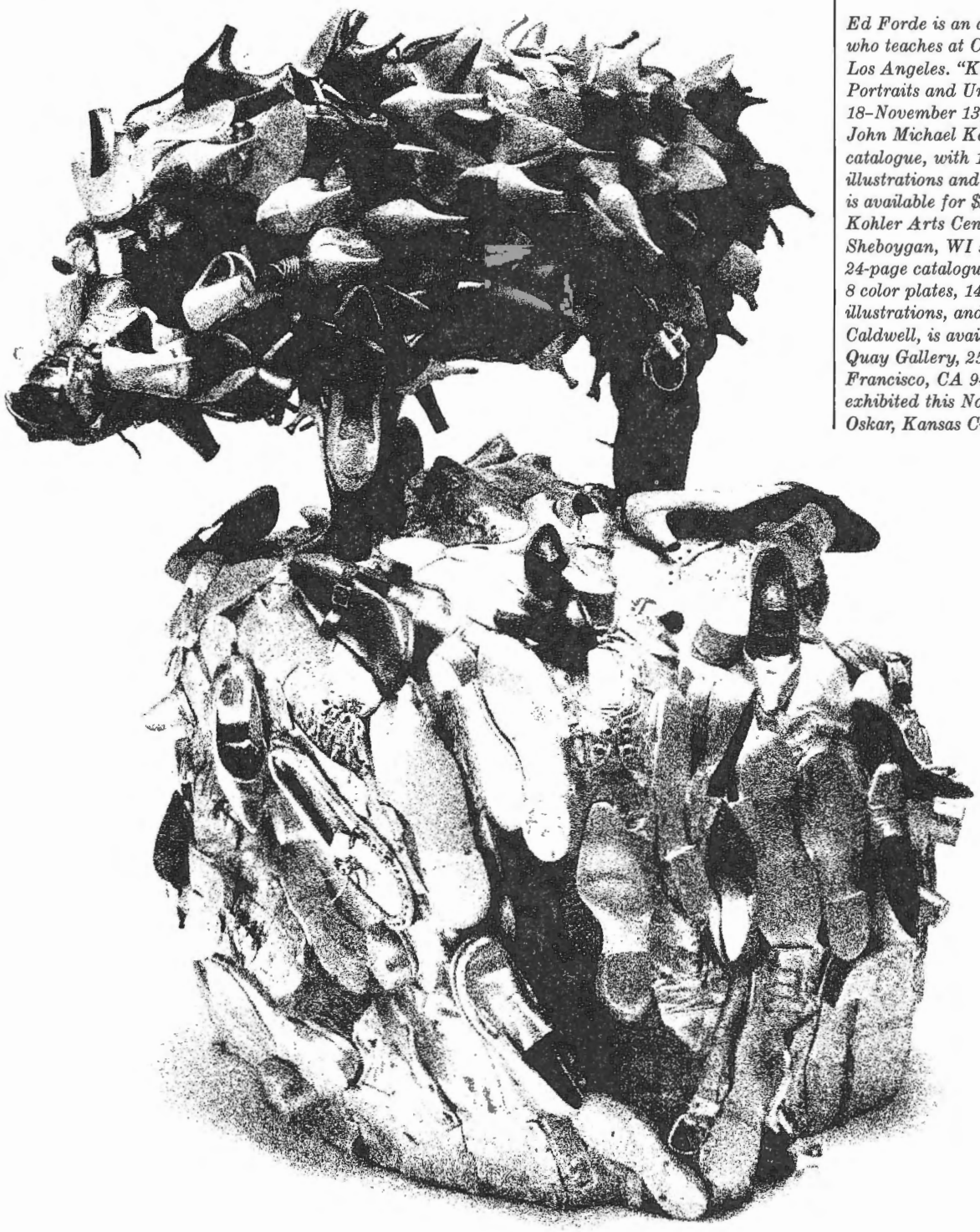
Everything comes together in the most recent work. Life-size animals, their bodies covered in a hide of shoes and other leather goods, are the natural resolution of so many of the artist's previous interests. There's Western subject matter—deer, dogs, bears, pigs, mountain lions—and the attention to surface as the dominant force of the work, seen here in the ingenious use of leather shoes as the painterly device. Discarded high heels, tennis shoes, loafers, and cowboy boots are uncanny vehicles for gestures of color, movement, and texture. And while the tactile quality of cowhide is the perfect skin for animal sculpture, by drawing upon the manmade world of human apparel, Little ironically injects into the natural world the human presence that may be the cause of its demise. Using the color and texture of shoes, he has found a unique way to indulge his love of surface decoration without actually painting. *Poke*, a silver pig covered with

Deluge Ken *(1980), 63" (157.5 cm) high, ceramic.*

Poke *(1982), 64" (160 cm) high, shoes, leather, paint, mixed media.*

high-heeled shoes of many colors, the spikes all pointing straight back from the body, is a dynamic image. Its title (a Southern rendering of "pork?") underscores this porker's aggressive stance; the spiky surface, which "pokes" at us or might possibly "poke your eye out," lends it a windblown or propelled appearance, while endowing the beast with bristling energy. *Nurse*, a massive, lurking mountain lion covered entirely with red shoes, straddles a large black snake. The lumpy shoe textures resemble muscles rippling across the lion's torso as it protects its slithering companion. These are tough, singular critters that physically exert their individual identities. Their vitality can be credited mostly to the empathetic success of the shoe and leather surfaces and to the posed dynamics of their body language. The physicality and spirit of these animals is overwhelming. Not all of the sculptures aspire to the bold and the dramatic, however. Forces is a young deer covered in soft leather, a delicate golden fawn, with the face of a supple old cowboy boot. These animals are all in a state of constant motion. Some are propelled by the strange boat-shaped bases on which they stand; others are lurking or floating along, or perched on strange, asymmetrical forms. They never stand alone. This sensation of movement, in conjunction with the crawling, vibrant surfaces, makes these pieces "dance." They are like candid snapshots, arrested moments of physical activity.

Ken Little is the Mark Twain of contemporary sculpture. His current work brings out the cowboy in this son of Texas, that tongue-in-cheek myth of the country boy who outslicks the urban sophisticate. On a cursory level, these appliqué mixed-media pigs and bears resemble so much Western tourist memorabilia, like the hunter's trophies hanging in the den that is their source. But with a rare sensitivity to materials, Little manages to articulate a spectrum of emotional and physical qualities that say much about the relations between man and animal.



Ed Forde is an artist and free-lance writer who teaches at California State University, Los Angeles. "Ken Little: Shattered Portraits and Unlikely Heroes" (September 18–November 13, 1983) was organized by the John Michael Kohler Art Center. An 8-page catalogue, with 11 black-and-white illustrations and an essay by Joanne Cubbs, is available for $2.50 postpaid from the Kohler Arts Center, 608 New York Avenue, Sheboygan, WI 53081. A more extensive, 24-page catalogue, Ken Dawson Little, *with 8 color plates, 14 black-and-white illustrations, and an essay by Susan Havens Caldwell, is available for $10 postpaid from Quay Gallery, 254 Sutter Street, San Francisco, CA 94108. Work by Little will be exhibited this November at Gallery Karl Oskar, Kansas City.*

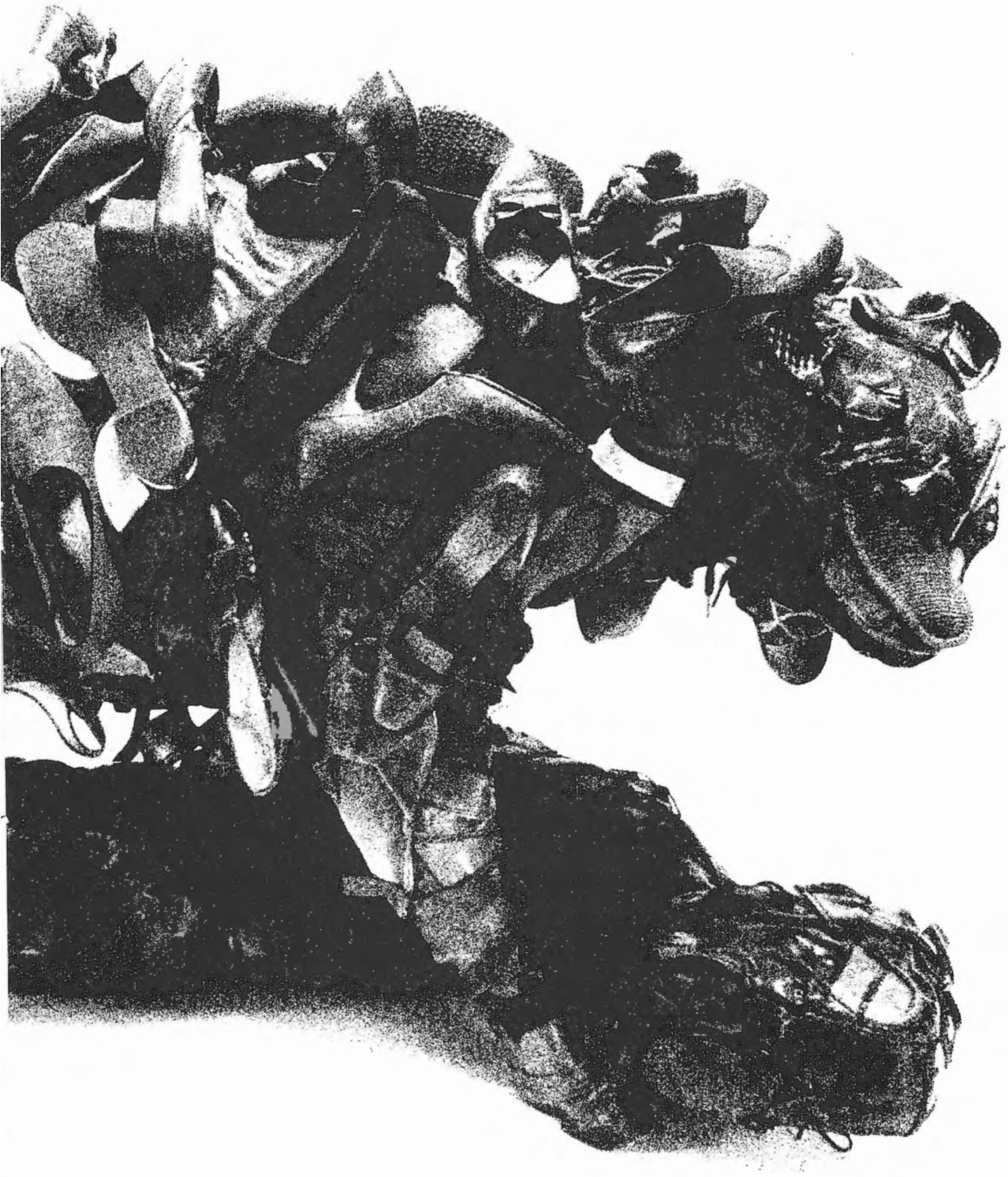
First Situation with Hay *(1973–74), 61″ (152.5 cm) high, ceramic, rope, hay.*

Forces *(1982), 84″ (210 cm) long, leather, paint, shoes, mixed media.*

(Opposite page) Bare *(1979), 54″ (135 cm) high, ceramic. Photo: Joe Nobody.*

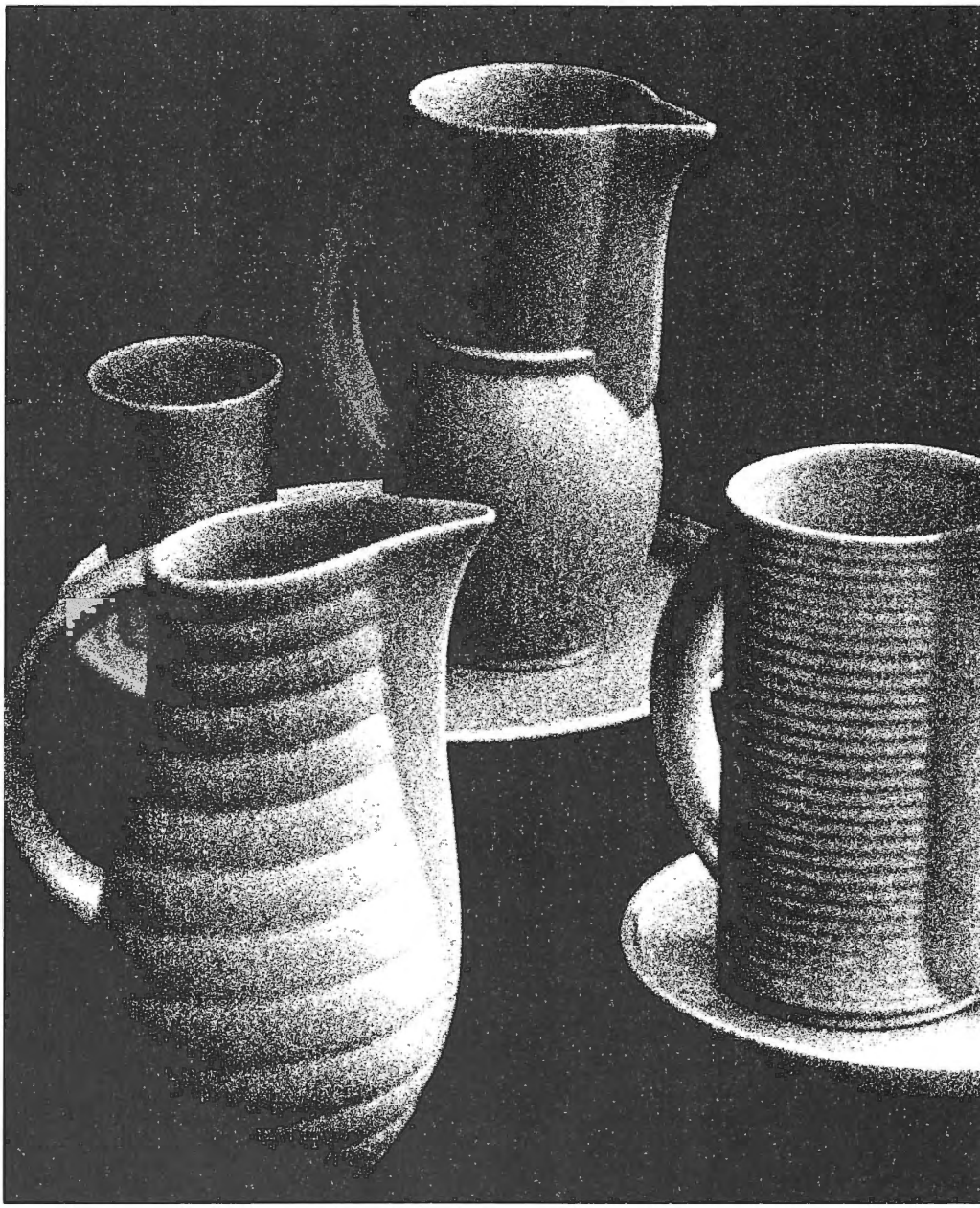
Faye on the Ottoman *(1978), 26" (65 cm) high, ceramic.*

Nurse *(1982), 80" (200 cm) long, shoes, leather, mixed media.*



Eva Zeisel: Humanistic Design for Mass Production

Sarah Bodine



Pitchers and tumblers for Schramberg factory (except pitcher at far right), Germany (ca. 1929).

Eva Zeisel defies easy categorization. A pioneer of twentieth-century ceramic design, she nonetheless deviated markedly from the strict functionalism of modernist philosophy in her conviction that good design is based not only on usefulness and aesthetics, but on communication with an audience.

Zeisel sought to synthesize a humanistic functionalism in timely designs that were both pleasant to touch and easy to use. Her tableware was both expressive and retrained. Highly valued artistically, it also sold well. Over the course of her career, close to fifteen hundred of her designs reached the American and foreign markets. Her work was widely exhibited from the 1940s to the 1960s both in one-person industrial design exhibits, including a 1946 show at the Museum of Modern Art, and with other noted designers of household products in shows such as "Table Settings, the Old with the New" in 1957 at the Brooklyn Museum of Fine Arts, which included work by Russel Wright and Raymond Loewy.

Zeisel was drawn to the classic lines and geometry of elegant, Oriental porcelain, as well as the organic shapes and irregularity of traditional peasant earthenware.

Growing up in the age of modernism, she distinguished herself from her European contemporaries by her ability to synthesize these two seemingly divergent aesthetics. While early in her career she experimented with a "compass and ruler" style, her work was never as severely geometric as Trudi Petri-Raben's 1920 dinnerware designs for Royal Berlin Porcelain. Yet, while she apprenticed herself to a peasant potter as a teenager, her work did not celebrate the hand of the maker, as did British potter Lucie Rie's handthrown tableware.

The 1940s and fifties, after Zeisel had emigrated to the United States, marked the era of her greatest success and acceptance.

Her work continued to embrace a craft aesthetic that translated into harmonious, sensuous, functional tableware for the American home. While resisting the compelling influences of modern art, as well as the supposed efficiencies of industrially produced, geometric machined forms, she was able to incorporate in her ceramic designs that intuitive element that Herbert Read, in his book *Art and Industry*, finds an essential quality to aesthetic appeal. The fact that she was able to do this set her apart from her American contemporaries, such as Russel Wright, who approached many of the same problems in dinnerware design for industrial production. In comparing their work, one notices Wright's exaggerated lines and sometimes awkward attachment of lids and handles. Wright acknowledged in his autobiography a debt to European Surrealism in his designs, which can account for their sometimes grotesque nature.

Early in her career Zeisel had rebelled against turn-of-the-century movements that defined the program of "new truths" in good design. One such definition came from Hermann Muthesius, a founding father of the Deutsche Werkbund, who in 1899 claimed that good design consisted of "genuine materials, identity of form and function, and the expression of the designer's individuality and mood"—in that order. Muthesius believed that the capabilities of the machine should establish rules for the designer. Zeisel, on the other hand, felt that price, function, and appearance should be the priorities of good design. She recognized a need for the designer to communicate with an audience on an expressive level through the spirit of the designed object, whether it was handcrafted or machine produced. She felt modern design, with its aggressive antihistoricism, ignored the crucial human need to link the past with the future.

Zeisel's design philosophy evolved as a result of her own early training in the craft and fine arts, as well as in reaction to the era in which she grew up. Born in Hungary in 1906, Zeisel was a painting student at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts when, attracted by the shapes and decoration of traditional Hungarian pottery, she decided to apprentice herself to one of the few remaining peasant potters. With him she learned the entire process of hand ceramic production, from preparing the river clay to throwing it on a potter's wheel and smoke-firing it into black flower pots, planters, and pitchers. Later, Zeisel began to produce her first independent ceramic work in the greenhouse of her family's garden. One of these designs, a cut-out lantern, was part of the Hungarian exhibition that won an honorary mention at the 1926 sesquicentennial exhibition in Philadelphia.

Zeisel realized that handcraft could not ultimately compete with industrial manufacture. Nevertheless, she saw a new direction for ceramic production developing in Hungary and Europe, where craftsman-designers were introducing up-to-date equipment and production methods to their own shops. For example, as early as 1906 the Deutsche Werkstätten had already begun to develop furniture for mass production. By offering a variety of new designs, they were able to compete successfully with less inventive manufacturers and thereby challenged them to improve their designs. Because of her early talent as an independent craftsman-designer, Zeisel was invited to establish the art department at Kispester (Granit), Hungary's first modern earthenware factory, where she designed handthrown samples that were later produced in commercial quantities. This became a successful operation, which sold Zeisel's animal ashtrays and other designs both in Hungary and the United States.

Zeisel became a ceramic designer during the height of the conflict debated relentlessly among many twentieth-century design movements, including the Deutsche Werkbund, the Wiener Werkstätte, and the Bauhaus: should the machine direct design or should design direct the machine? Convinced that mass-produced ware should not duplicate craftwork, she felt that factory techniques, such as precise reproduction by casting, could be used to introduce simple yet expressive design on a large scale.

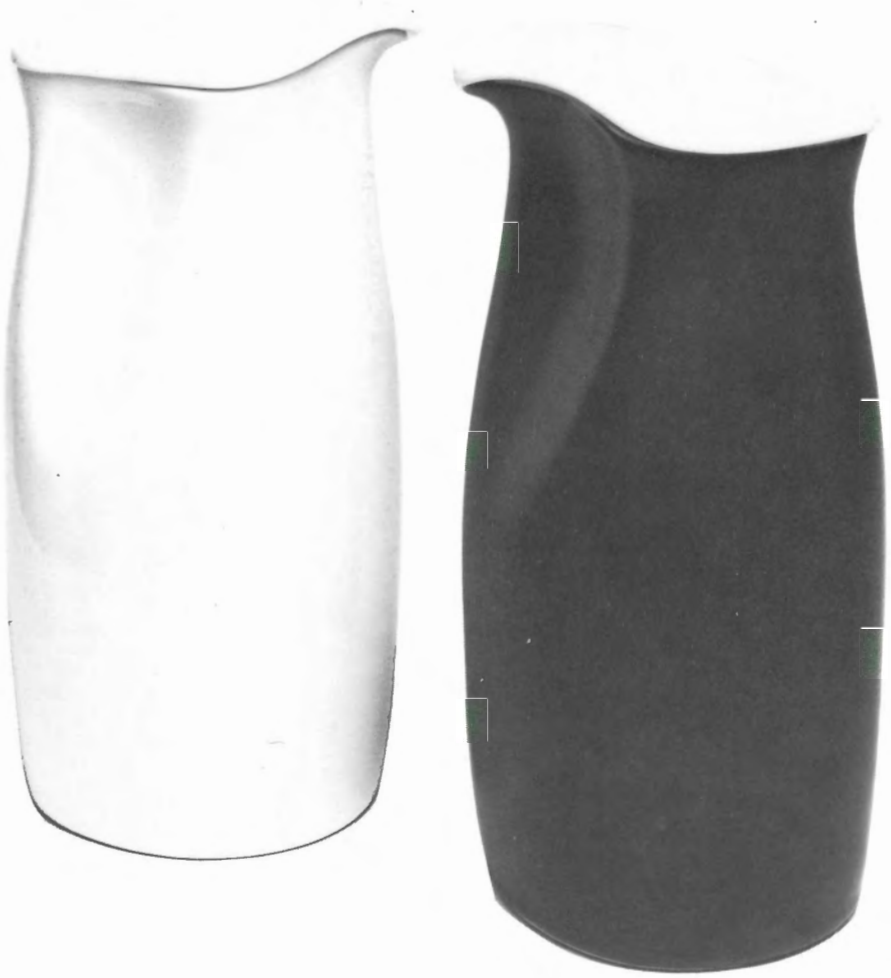
In 1928, Zeisel was given the opportunity to meet the challenge of mass production head on, when she became a designer at the Schramberger Majolika Fabrik in Germany. She had never before designed on paper, but she convinced an architect friend to teach her quickly the rudiments of drafting. Her first samples at Schramberg consisted exclusively of simple geometric designs, she explains, due to an inquiry by her new bosses: "Do you wish to throw or draft your samples?" "Draft, of course," she hastily replied, proud of her newly acquired skill.

By the end of the twenties, says Zeisel, "geometry had become fashionable" under the cumulative influence of Cubism, the Bauhaus, and the linear articulation of Otto Wagner, Josef Hoffmann, and other modern architects. "I could make a good living as a designer without ever making a free line. Exclusive use of compass and ruler, however, does not encourage the designer to pour out sentiments."

Yet it was while she was designing these purely geometric shapes in 1929 that Zeisel wrote in the ceramic trade paper, *Die Schaulade*, that her designs were meant to establish a bond with her audience. To be friendly companions, however, they should also be restrained enough not to disturb

Pitcher for Riverside China Co. (ca. 1946). Photo: Brent Brolin.

Refrigerator containers for Hall China Co. (1951). Photo: Richard Goodbody.



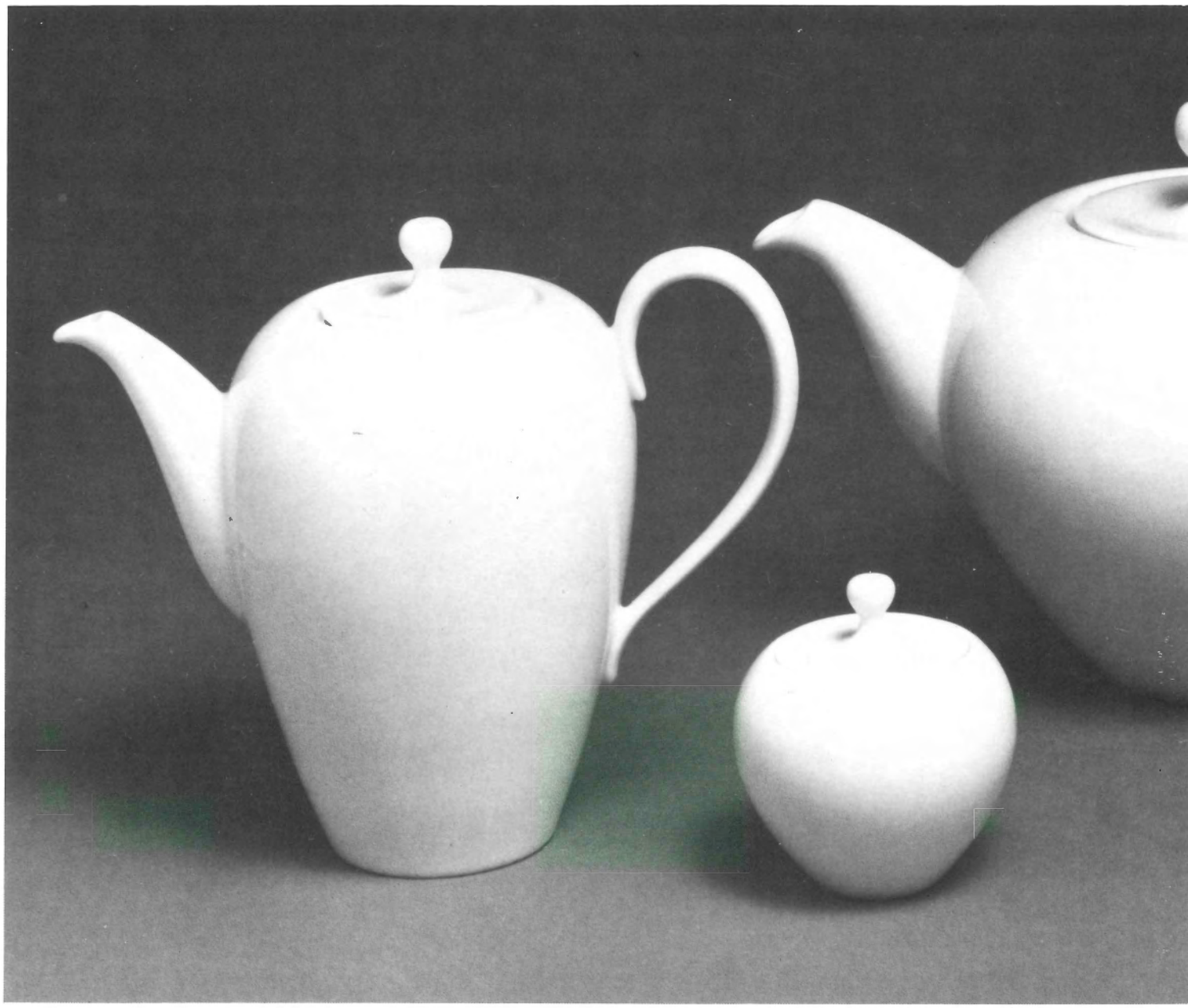
their owners or demand unnecessary attention. Her own affinity for the needs and desires of the consumer set her apart philosophically from her contemporaries at the Bauhaus, who by this time, she wrote, "had endorsed a geometric form language supported by an elitist system of tenets of rationalism, simplicity, and honesty of material. This form language, as explained by the Cubists, was 'to be preached to the people, not to be loved by them.'"[1]

While Zeisel's work and that of such Bauhaus ceramic designers as Otto Lindig and Trudi Petri-Raben may seem to share the underlying belief that handcraft designs could inspire new form types for industrial production, they differ in philosophical approach. "The Bauhaus accepted the machine as the essentially modern vehicle of form," Walter Gropius stated in a paper delivered to the Design and Industries Association in 1934. Zeisel believed that adherence to machine form produced cold, inhuman, anonymous design. Expressiveness and communication were for her the hallmarks of good design, which had nothing to do with the proper functioning of a product. "I have never seen any useful article that could not well have been done in innumerable shapes and contours, equally well suited to its purposes," she wrote in the Fall, 1946 issue of the Walker Art Center's "Everyday Art Quarterly." "Telephones, shoes, cars—all highly functional—are done in a variety of forms."

The many geometric shapes Zeisel created while working for the Schramberg and Carsten factories in Germany include lamp bases, inkwells, and ashtrays. They reveal a combination of good humor and practicality that appealed to consumers. Flat-sided pitchers, for example, designed for Schramberg and manufactured in pastel colors, fit well on the shelves of small European apartments and also provided pleasurable associations in their substantial, circular bodies and erect, birdlike necks and spouts.

In 1932, Zeisel vacationed in Russia, then in the grip of social changes that were attracting many European intellectuals. Her stay was unexpectedly extended when she was asked to work as a foreign design expert for the china and glass industry. She first traveled in the Ukraine, where traditional peasant pottery was still being produced alongside huge factories turning out thousands of plates. Whereas in the past entire families would share food from one large bowl, now, with collectivization, each person ate from his own plate. This demanded both simple, compatible design and the mass-production efficiency Zeisel had learned about in Germany.

She was next invited to Leningrad to work on various projects at Lomonosov, the former Imperial Porcelain Factory: standardization of dinnerware,



replacement of metal with ceramics in consumer goods, outdoor electrical fixtures with interchangeable parts, as well as children's sets and tableware. At Lomonosov she met Suprematist artists Kasimir Malevich and Nikolai Suetin, then artistic director at the factory. Suetin was noted for his application of Suprematist motifs—black and red geometric designs in asymmetrical configurations—to the classic porcelain shapes that Lomonosov traditionally produced. Zeisel admired Suetin's exacting sense of composition as well as his sensitivity in editing other's work, subtly improving the form as well as the character of a piece.

Zeisel later moved to the huge Doulevo china factory in Moscow, where she established an experimental, independent design laboratory complete with artists, modelmakers, and moldmakers. Her department maintained tight control over the designs produced as prototypes for the factory, reworking them again and again until they were honed to the designer's standard. Here, at the largest ceramic manufacturer in the world, Zeisel was given the opportunity to pursue her objective of good design for mass production. She also worked to improve the status and wages of the factory workers and to inaugurate an apprenticeship system. Her goal as the complete designer was always to understand and control both design and production, to be able to satisfy standards of economy as well as beauty.

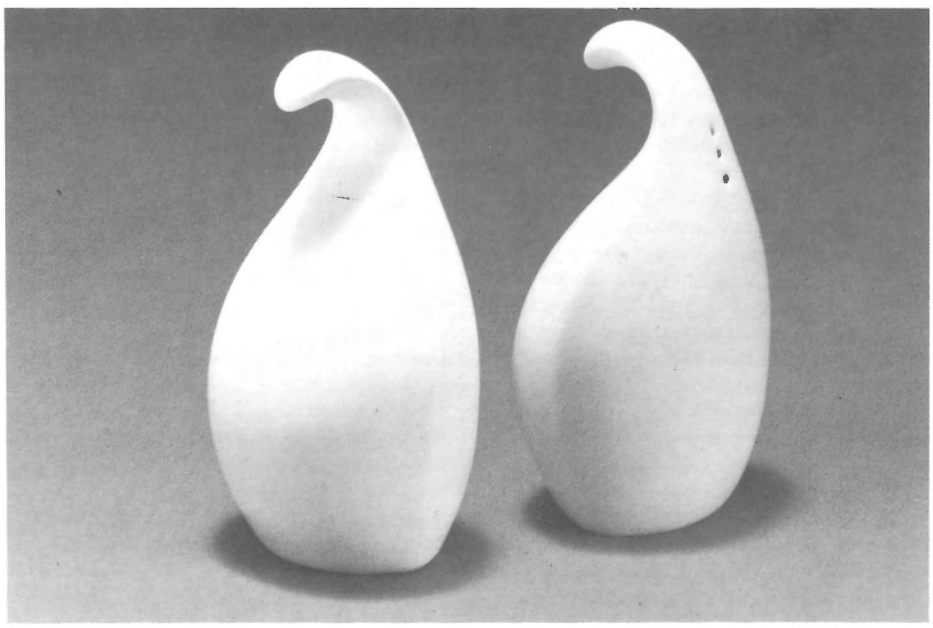
During her five years in Russia, Zeisel's work there earned her the title of Artistic Leader (Art Director) of the China and Glass Industry of the Russian Republic and resulted in many sets that were later shown at the Paris, Brussels, and New York World's Fairs.

In 1937, Zeisel returned to Vienna and eventually emigrated to the United States. By September of 1939 she had been invited to teach at Pratt Institute by Donald Dohner, head of the industrial design department there, and had started work on a ceramic giftware line produced in New Jersey. In 1940, she designed a set of housewares and dishes for Universal China. Called Stratoware, the set was featured in the Sears Roebuck catalogue, where Zeisel was given full design credit—a first for a woman.

As a teacher, at Pratt for fifteen years and at Rhode Island School of Design in 1959–60, she encouraged her students to investigate the expressive and communicative power of the means at their disposal, to study the associations of their lines and shapes with form and line in nature, with human, classical, and geometric forms. She felt that small deviations in these might well create unease in the viewer. For Zeisel, ceramic design was a way of making "friendly

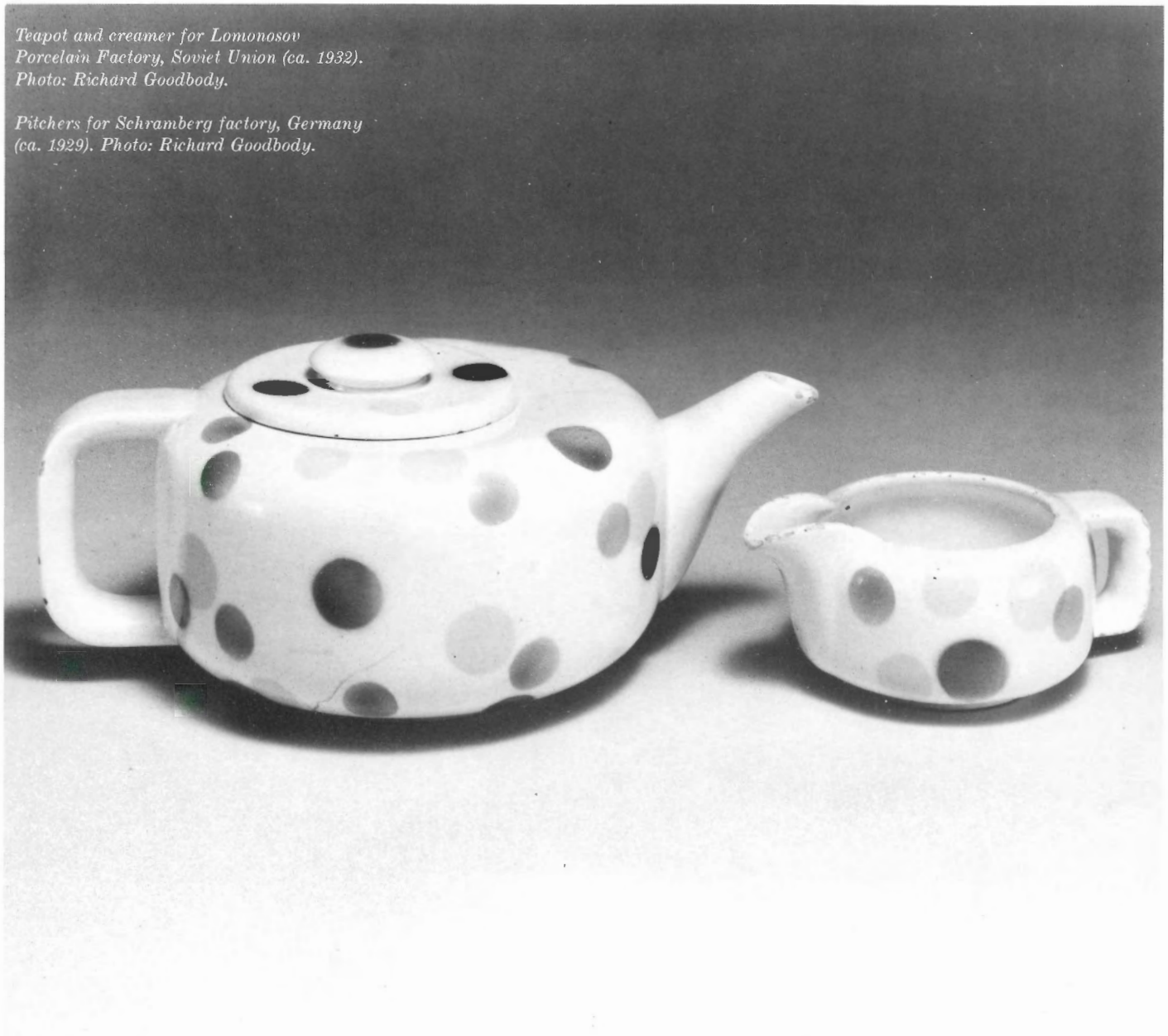
Shape Eva *coffee pot, sugar bowl, teapot, cup, and creamer for Thomas line of Rosenthal (1958). Photo: Richard Goodbody.*

Salt and pepper shakers for Hall China's Century *line (ca. 1955). Photo: Richard Goodbody.*



connections" between herself and the consumer. Thus she believed that a designer should aim not to revolutionize the world but to work with it. Zeisel's philosophical dedication to audience and function allows her to resist the seductive aspects of fashion and self-expression. The challenge of mass production for her was to approach it from the perspective of the average person, to make it feel comfortable and part of everyday life. Her designs are deceptively simple, a continuation rather than a departure from or distortion of traditional shapes. Even the most surprising or "different" shapes look in some way familiar, expected.

Zeisel designs a new set of dishes by sketching a still life, grouping the pieces to explore their general, shared character. But she avoids the monotony of a mechanical distribution of the same elements among the group. Instead, she tries to coordinate it by vague family



Teapot and creamer for Lomonosov Porcelain Factory, Soviet Union (ca. 1932). Photo: Richard Goodbody.

Pitchers for Schramberg factory, Germany (ca. 1929). Photo: Richard Goodbody.

resemblances, relating them as cousins and uncles rather than siblings and parents. The problem is analogous to that of designing an alphabet in which interrelated curves and echoes of shapes are used on different letters. Within a set of dishes, bowl, plate, and pitcher are similarly linked through a complex formal relationship.

To check these relationships at various stages of design development, she assembles the pieces in an "aging cabinet" equipped with spotlights to highlight curves and shadows. She lives with her designs studying the "still life" in the cabinet, changing a foot here, a handle there, until the relationships seem to work. She realizes that in everyday use tableware is viewed from a variety of angles, most frequently from slightly above. This angle totally alters the symmetry and elegance of the original, two-dimensional paper design and often forces Zeisel to adjust the object. Furthermore, light and shadow can create optical illusions that may make a foot seem narrower, for example, and the piece seem to float in a dark pool, or else alter the proportions of the piece to make a simple lid or handle seem unnecessarily predominant.

She also considers the functional qualities of the pieces. Take, for example, an everyday coffee cup. Zeisel has studied the relationship of the profile of a cup to the way it is tipped for drinking. To prevent spilling, a cup with an inturned lip is best, but it is also the most awkward to drink from. An open cup requires no head movement but can spill easily. Taking the audience argument a step further, she notes that while an open cup would work in a fine tea set, it would not function well in hospitals or school cafeterias.

Other functional considerations for ceramic tableware design are weight, balance, storage, and manageability. The ware must hold food and drink without spilling or dripping, have a smooth surface so utensils don't scrape, and be easy to clean.

To see Zeisel's philosophy and problem solving in action, consider two tableware lines she was commissioned to design in the late forties: one for Castleton China in collaboration with The Museum of Modern Art, and one for the Red Wing Potteries in Red Wing, Minnesota.

In 1940 The Museum of Modern Art held an "Organic Design" competition for contemporary furnishings and agreed to help mass-produce the winning designs. MOMA's receptive attitude prompted Castleton China to approach the museum to collaborate on a contemporary tableware line. While the proposal was being considered, Eliot Noyes, then director of MOMA's design department, heard Zeisel speak on design for handwork and mass production at The Metropolitan Museum

of Art.

Noyes became convinced that Zeisel should be the designer of the Castleton line, which was to be called *Museum White*, the first contemporary translucent porcelain dinnerware produced in the United States for a sophisticated market. Castleton hoped it would become a "modern heirloom," competing with ware produced by large European factories. Moreover, the company expected that MOMA's imprimateur would help build the reputation of both the ware and the manufacturer. The museum, however, though interested in promoting the manufacture of high-quality contemporary design, was worried about its own reputation as an arbiter of taste. After all, the dinnerware was to be shown at a rare one-person design exhibition at the museum and would later be included in its permanent design collection.

Zeisel's challenge was to accommodate both parties by designing forms that could be mass produced but were also stately, retrained, and timeless. To help, Castleton provided a translucent porcelain body well-suited to the elegance of the final design. Zeisel made use of the plastic beauty of this material in the plates and bowls by specifying a thick base for balance and mass, with a contrasting lip pulled to refined thinness. The thick-to-thin development from foot to rim also imparted what the designer termed a "fleshy" touch and created a dynamic balance in the hand. "The weight makes them feel valuable," she later commented, "and their thin edges elegant and fine." The museum and Zeisel concurred on a lustrous off-white glaze, even though achieving this blemish-free surface produced many rejects during manufacture. The glaze brought out the shapes of the pieces, emphasizing form to a public up to then smothered with decoration and ornament on dinnerware. *Museum White* expressed Zeisel's love for both sensuous curves and restrained simplicity. Curves flowed from platter to serving bowl, from saucer to cup, from coffee pot body to lid, imparting to the set a sense of organic unity. In this stately ware she incorporated her idea of family resemblance by designing a variety of bowls that, like flowers, appear to be in different stages of opening.

Castleton *Museum White* brought Zeisel into the public eye. Time magazine called her "one of America's top-notch designers"; *American Home* magazine referred to her as one of the century's most celebrated designers. Her designs were shown at practically all "Good Design" shows sponsored by MOMA. She was also given one-person shows at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and at other museums. She was invited to lecture at universities and she participated in

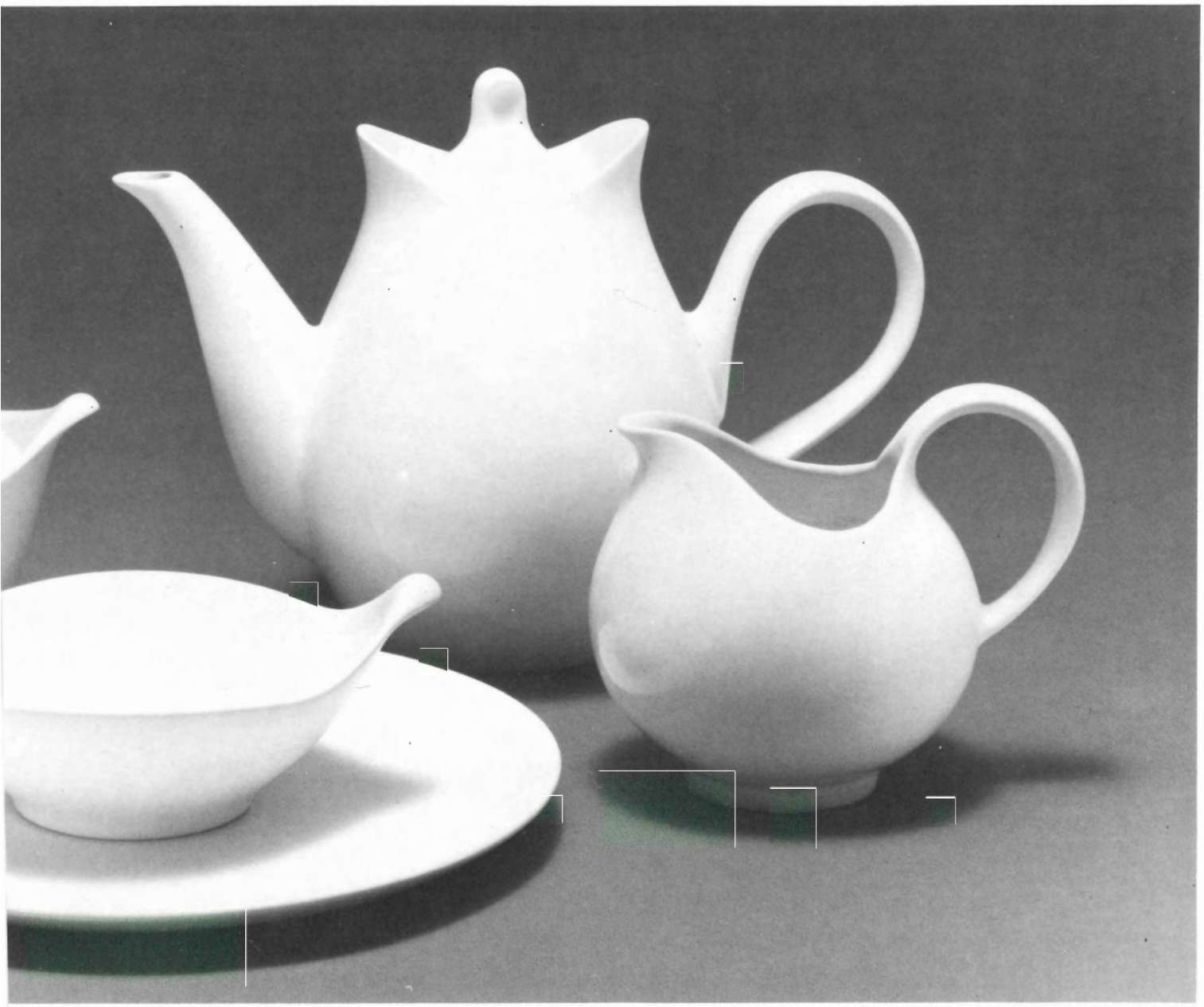
roundtable conferences organized by MOMA.

In contrast to *Museum White*, the Red Wing line was produced in very large quantities from cheap earthenware that chipped easily and on which glazes crazed with use. This "Greenwich Villagey" ware was called *Town and Country*, and the manufacturer's life expectancy for it was three years, a term predicated both on the poor quality of the material and the assumption that the owners would "grow tired" of them. Since a dinner plate in this line cost one dollar, the teapot three dollars, such disposability was also economically feasible for the average household.

The *Town and Country* line was unusually diverse, a fact that underscores its humble status; compared to many tableware designs, the line was less precious, less collectible, less durable. Zeisel's design solution included exuberant animal and plant shapes that are best seen in pairs, where lines flow together. She played with detail, fashioning handles resembling Mickey Mouse ears, creating silkwood-pod–shaped pitchers, and nestling together smooth, homuncular bodies as salt and pepper shakers. Asymmetry was also a prominent design feature—the teapot lid sat off-center, while the mass of the plate was lopsided. Yet for all its playfulness, there was a soothing horizontality to this line that conveyed a homey, informal feeling. Simple glazes on undecorated surfaces were softened by a matte or semigloss finish in quiet slates, ivories, rusts, and blues. Town and Country was the epitome of touchable, friendly pottery.

By 1970, the residential ceramic industry in the United States had declined markedly. Large factories, including Red Wing Potteries, went bankrupt and were forced to close. Zeisel, however, had already felt a need to move on to other intellectual pursuits. In the tradition of her family (her mother, grandmother, and uncles were all historians), she embarked in 1972 on research for a book on American history, which she is now in the final stages of writing. Based on her former achievements, she received a Senior Level Sabbatical Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1982. Zeisel continues to design furniture and ceramics, but most of these have not appeared on the market. In the summer of 1983 she returned to Hungary to design a series of fifteen pieces for the Zsolnay Factory in Pecs.

Despite her success, it was never Zeisel's primary artistic ambition to design ceramics. She dreamed of being a painter, and design was a way of supporting herself to paint and to travel. This attitude was, perhaps ironically, the key to her success in working with industry. She saw her work as a craft, not as an art. While innate



artistic expression often guided her designs, her pragmatism allowed her some distance.

As a ceramic designer for industry her hands rarely touched clay, yet she was able to imbue mass-produced forms with a humanity and warmth most often attributed to handcraft. Her roots in Hungarian peasant pottery, her affinity for classic shapes, and her love for free-flowing line all informed her most successful work. Central to her achievement was her success in combining basic shapes with manufacturing economies, and control of her material through a theory of appropriateness, audience acceptability, and playfulness. She always hopes the consumer will want to touch the pieces she has designed and, after holding them, want to take them home.

1. Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, *On Cubism* (London: Unwin, 1913).

Sarah Bodine is a free-lance writer on art and design and the editor of Metalsmith *magazine. An exhibition entitled "Eva Zeisel: Designer for Industry," which is traveling in the United States under the auspices of SITES, will be shown at The Brooklyn Museum (October 6–November 18), The Art Institute of Chicago (December 8–January 20, 1985), The St. Louis Art Museum (April 13–May 26), and The Rhode Island School of Design (June 15—July 28). The show will continue to tour through August 1986 at other locations yet to be announced. A 120-page catalogue, which includes an article on Zeisel by Martin Eidelberg and an article by Zeisel on design, is available from the University of Chicago Press for $20.00.*

Bowls for Schramberg factory, Germany (ca. 1929). Photo: Richard Goodbody.

Pieces from Hall China's Century *line (ca. 1957). Photo: Richard Goodbody.*

Pieces from Hallcraft Classic *line (1949).*
Photo: Richard Goodbody.

Toward the Modern Style: Late Rookwood

Ruth Irwin Weidner

Traditional definitions of what constitutes "an antique" have tended to deflect the attentions of collectors, art historians, and social historians away from artifacts created in our own century. Thus, in-depth study of cultural and artistic values as seen through art objects seems to have been generally reserved for the relatively remote past, or for eras that roughly correspond with current concepts of what is collectible. There are, of course, exceptions. High-style designers of what may be called "modern classics" in the decorative arts are rarely entirely overlooked, especially when their work has bridged two artistic endeavors, for example, architecture and furniture design, or university teaching and studio crafts. Exhibitions and scholarly studies of the work of such eminent pre-1950 American designers as Frank Lloyd Wright, Adelaide Alsop-Robineau, and Louis Comfort Tiffany reflect scholarly preference for documentation of the careers and oeuvre of such stellar and innovative artists.

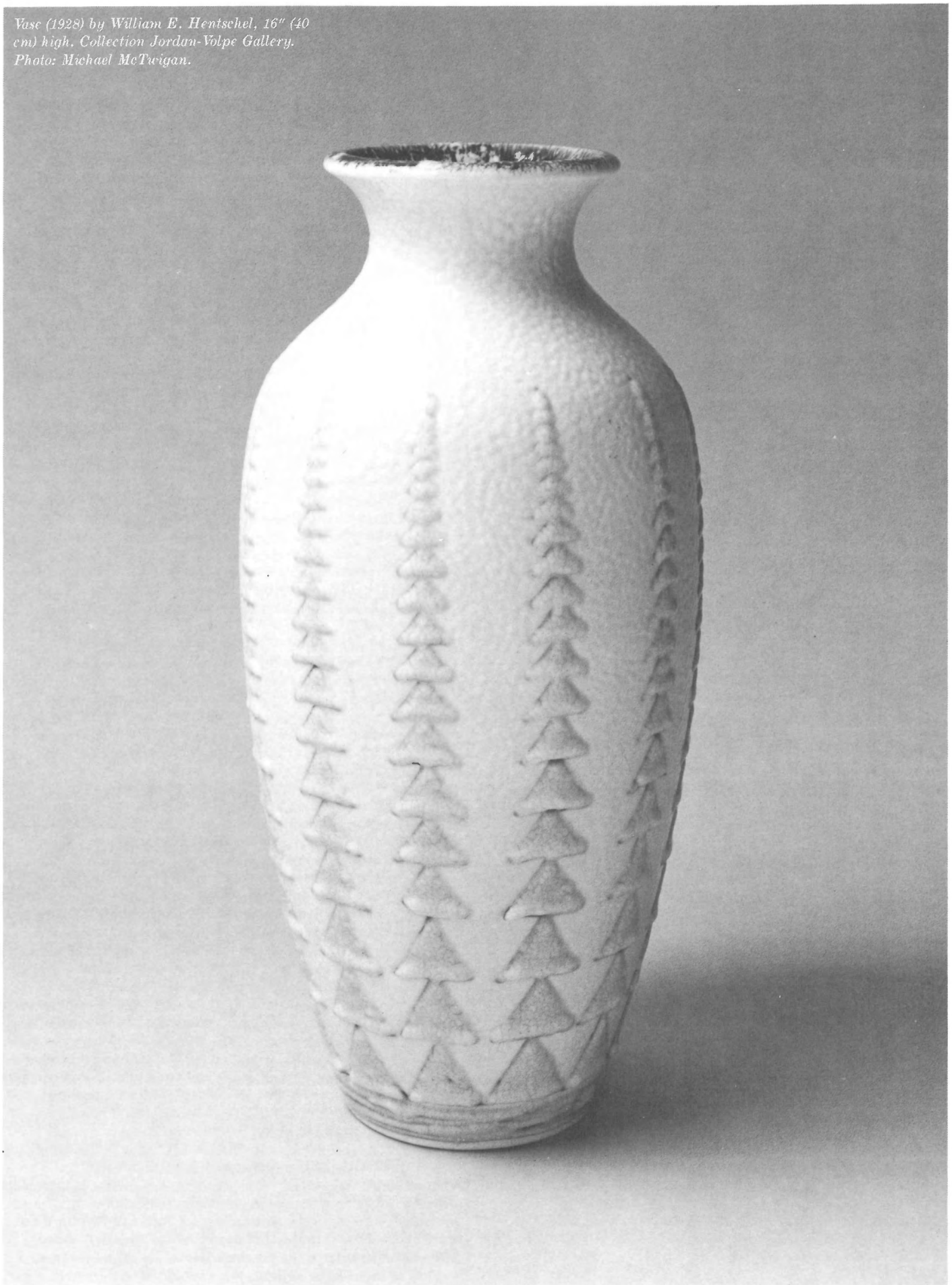
Collectors and decorative arts historians are aware of a recent emphasis on various popular collectibles of the first half of the twentieth century. Among these are certain groups of mass-produced objects which are grouped under such labels as "art deco" or "depression glass." In ceramics, there has been a developing (however incipient) concern for factory-produced dinnerwares of the first half of this century.[1] While these areas of study, on the whole, have remained somewhat separate from professional criticism and investigation, there is nonetheless evidence of activity in collecting and a desire to document key facts of these wares' production.

But there are many gaps in the serious study and investigation of this century's decorative objects. One deficit in scholarly inquiry has been that, until rather recently, the decorative arts have tended to be neglected, overlooked, or relegated to an inferior status by historians of American art. This is unfortunate for two reasons. First, historians trained in visual symbolism, imagery, and trends in design are in an excellent position to interpret artifacts—which are, after all, artistic expressions of the same society which produced eminent painters, sculptors, and architects. Moreover, decorative objects, whether they be ceramic vases, glass candlesticks, dining tables, easy chairs, farm implements, or kitchen wares, offer in certain respects more direct evidence of the broad values and expressions of a culture or society than do monumental works of sculpture, avant-garde architectural styles, or experimental paintings.

It is encouraging that within the last two decades we have seen a new attitude toward this country's decorative arts. Well-established graduate programs at Winterthur Museum, Yale University, and the University of Pennsylvania, to name only a few, have been fertile sources of study and analysis, especially for works created before 1900. Furthermore, the descriptive fabric of the study of American decorative arts has been enriched and revitalized as scholars from a number of related disciplines—such as American studies, folklife, and anthropology—have authenticated a focus on more humble objects than were commonly discussed in departments of art history, and in collaboration, have sought to raise meaningful questions. In short, we are finding new and innovative ways of looking at decorative objects.

In the context of this renewed investigation into American decorative art, ceramics have been favored recently and increasing attention has been accorded twentieth-century wares created for the popular market. In this connection, it is interesting to note the exhortations of Bernard L. Fontana in his keynote address for the 1972 Winterthur Museum Conference, "Ceramics in America":

We should know as much, if not more, about Homer Laughlin's hotel china and the dime-store dishes given away in gas stations as we do about the wares of Rudolf Christ (1750–1833), the master potter who spent his retiring years in the pottery shop at Salem, North Carolina. But where are the books, the studies, and the collections of everyday dishes of America?[2]



Vase (1928) by William E. Hentschel, 16" (40 cm) high. Collection Jordan-Volpe Gallery. Photo: Michael McTwigan.

(Top) Vase (1944) by Jens Jensen, 7 3/8" (18.4 cm) high. Collection Jordan-Volpe Gallery. Photo: Michael McTwigan.

(Above) Vase (1929) by Lenore Asbury, 11" (27.5 cm) high. Collection Jordan-Volpe Gallery. Photo: Michael McTwigan.

(Opposite page) Covered Jar (1930) by Louise Abel, 5 1/4" (13.1 cm) high. Collection Jordan-Volpe Gallery. Photo: Michael McTwigan.

Happily, recent scholarly emphasis on the activities and products of the Art Pottery Movement has opened the doors to both more intensive study of twentieth-century objects and a greater willingness to exhibit and examine wares produced for a mass market.

Since 1979, The Jordan-Volpe Gallery, New York City, has taken the lead by organizing several key exhibitions of the output of American pottery companies whose activity spanned the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first two exhibits were "Fulper Art Pottery: An Aesthetic Appreciation, 1909–1929" and "Ode to Nature: Flowers and Landscapes of the Rookwood Pottery, 1880–1940." To the last-named show, Jordan-Volpe Gallery staged a welcome sequel last year: "Toward the Modern Style: Rookwood Pottery, The Later Years, 1915–1950." Accompanied by an impressive scholarly catalogue essay by art historian Kenneth R. Trapp, curator in the Department of Decorative Arts, Cincinnati Art Museum, and foremost Rookwood scholar, the exhibition featured 144 objects, chiefly vases, from a period of the pottery's productive years that has heretofore not received specific attention. The exhibition was an eye-opener, but more than that, a reminder that twentieth-century decorative arts deserve more serious attention than they have so far been accorded.

The Rookwood Pottery, founded in Cincinnati, Ohio, by Maria Longworth Nichols in 1880, quickly became this country's leading art pottery. In view of Rookwood's extraordinary artistic successes in its earlier years, so well documented by the Jordan-Volpe Gallery in its 1980 "Ode to Nature" exhibition, one might have expected a viewing of Rookwood's later products to be anticlimactic. The earlier show, composed mainly of vases crafted between 1882 and 1920, proved that Rookwood products can best be understood and appreciated as a group. These earlier wares, seen together, undoubtedly impressed most onlookers with their almost magical subtlety of glaze finishes and three-dimensional landscape vistas.

The effect of Jordan-Volpe's "Toward the Modern Style" exhibition was altogether different. Rather than being quietly seduced by the understated, irresistible elegance of the earlier vases, viewers may have immediately felt the impact of vibrant color and design, for popular artistic tastes had shifted after 1900 and, as asserted by Rookwood president John D. Wareham in 1934, company artists were encouraged to express themselves "in the idiom of the day."[3]

Although the incipient artistic changes of the modern movement can be readily perceived by the 1860s or 1870s, their impact was not profound on a popular level in this country until after 1900. George Kubler, in his important treatise, *The Shape of Time*, points to a sudden transformation in occidental art and architecture about 1910, during which "an entire language of form suddenly [fell] into disuse, being replaced by a new language of different components, and an unfamiliar grammar."[4] Although Kubler's essay refers more directly to major artistic expressions—the innovations of Pablo Picasso and the impulses which led to the founding of the Bauhaus and the International Style in architecture, for example—Kubler himself advances the supposition that "the idea of art can be expanded to embrace the whole range of man-made things."[5] Thus, on closer examination, his theories of abrupt change in the Western world's artistic vision circa 1910 may certainly be applied to the seemingly profound alterations in design concept at the Rookwood Pottery Company, even when one considers that wares produced for a popular market may understandably lag somewhat behind primary, commissioned works or experimental expressions.

In the provocative exhibition, "Rookwood Pottery: The Later Years," international influences were immediately and unquestionably apparent. Many of the vessels on display seemed drenched in color, a change in chromatic philosophy apparent in late nineteenth-century painting but not fully realized until the work of *Les Fauves* in the first decade of the twentieth century. Whereas objects from the previous Rookwood show evoked a quality of dawn or moonlight, vases exhibited in the recent show

reverberated with the coloristic qualities of late afternoon or sunset, their color range dominated by mauves, raspberry, magenta, lilac, maroon, rust, various purples, and indigo.

A second major change in these wares is the general shunning of three-dimensional pictorial effects in favor of an emphasis on surface qualities. Evident is a turning away from the ceramic piece as a mirror of the natural world. Rather, these later designs are essentially two-dimensional, albeit that many pieces depend upon incised or low-relief decoration. Finally, the essential realism of earlier Rookwood decoration has given way to abstraction and stylization.

Of the Rookwood decorators represented, the work of three artists in particular stand out. Edward T. Hurley, whose important earlier work was in a quiet, naturalistic vein associated with Tonalism in painting, by the early 1920s had largely forsaken his former poetic, ethereal landscapes for expressionistic surface designs which depend for their success on an extraordinary intensity of color. The change in artistic viewpoint is phenomenal. In the 1920s and 1930s, designer William E. Hentschel developed striking abstract designs with his bold surface effects. And Jens Jensen, a Danish artist who worked at Rookwood from the late 1920s through the late 1940s, contributed what may be the most unusual designs exhibited: linear abstractions of human figures and plant and animal forms. Two of these vases—low, bulbous forms—seem to have derived inspiration from the kind of primitivism explored by Picasso sgraffito and slip-decorated earthenwares as well. A sense of motion lends a narrative quality to certain of Jensen's designs. Less direct is the dreamlike, otherworldly, evocation of his nude figures on certain vases. These figures, boldly defined by expressive, undulating outlines, are not unlike the female nudes or "Bacchantes" made popular by the molded glass of René Lalique.

Other decorators, for example, Lenore Asbury, who had been employed since the 1890s, and Arthur Conant, new to the staff in about 1915, produced designs which seem to form more of a bridge between Rookwood's early and late works. This is perhaps in part because their works engage either the formerly popular high glazes or vellum finishes, and also because they continued to focus on floral and landscape motifs. However, much greater stylization and two dimensionality, and bolder color contrasts, are the hallmarks of their designs in the later period.

With their presentation of this important exhibition and its accompanying catalogue, Jordan-Volpe Gallery and Kenneth Trapp have offered the public and students of ceramics a provocative insignt into twentieth-century design transitions. Rookwood's altered artistic focus after about 1900,[6] but especially after 1915, reflected both international trends and popular aesthetic sensibilities. Without this subtle but nonetheless obvious adaptation to prevalent tastes, the Rookwood business could not have survived—however tenuously—so long into the twentieth century. "Toward the Modern Style" has not only supplemented the previous Rookwood exhibition, "Ode to Nature," but has doubled its value. More importantly, it has enhanced our understanding of changing tastes and artistic trends in the period 1900–1950. Jordan-Volpe Gallery's leadership in drawing the attention of collectors, scholars, and the public toward a broader and more modern range of artistic creations is commendable and will undoubtedly invite other galleries and institutions to consider focusing on remaining gaps in decorative arts studies after 1900. In new attempts to understand this ever-widening field of decorative art, scholars should begin to pay careful attention to markets and advertising materials, innovative production methods and techniques, and identification of previously unrecognized design influences. Jordan-Volpe Gallery's "Toward the Modern Style" has been a seminal event for the study of ceramic production in this century.

1. See, for example, Jo Cunningham, *The Collector's Encyclopedia of American Dinnerware* (Paducah, Kentucky: Collector Books, 1982), or Lois Lehner, *Complete Book of American Kitchen and Dinner Wares* (Des Moines, Iowa: Wallace-Homestead, 1980).

2. Bernard L. Fontana, "The Cultural Dimensions of Pottery: Ceramics as Social Documents," in *Ceramics in America*, edited by Ian M. G. Quimby. Winterthur Conference Report, 1972 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1973), p.11.

3. *Cincinnati Times-Star*, July 16, 1934. Quoted in Kenneth R. Trapp, *Toward the Modern Style: Rookwood Pottery, The Later Years, 1915–1950* (New York: Jordan-Volpe Gallery, 1983), p. 32.

4. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p.70.

5. Ibid., p. 1.

6. For a study of Rookwood products just before and after 1900, see Kirsten H. Keen, "Rookwood Pottery at the Turn of the Century: Continuity and Change," in *Celebrate Cincinnati Art*, edited by Kenneth R. Trapp (Cincinnati, Ohio: Cincinnati Art Museum, 1982), pp. 71–89.

Ruth Irwin Weidner, librarian and associate professor at West Chester State College, Pennsylvania, is the author of American Ceramics Before 1930: A Bibliography. *The 70-page catalogue,* Toward the Modern Style: Rookwood Pottery, The Later Years, 1915–1950 *is available for $22.50 postpaid from Jordan-Volpe Gallery, 457 West Broadway, New York, NY 10012.*

Jun Kaneko drawing at the Omaha Brickworks, 1983. Photo: Vera Mercer.

Jun Kaneko

Lorne Falk

I have to admit to being stumped for a long while on what to say about Jun Kaneko's art, until I remembered how surprised I was each time I saw his new work. How can an artist—whose artistic production could be summarized simplistically as fifteen years of stripes—create such successful, engaging art with such consistency and apparently at odds with much that has currency in contemporary art? The clue, it seems to me now, lies in this element of surprise, and in my predicament of being tongue tied about what to say about it.

The viewer of art must not forget that perception and imagination are interchangeable, that art is more than meets the eye. In considering Kaneko's art specifically, the trap is to think that it is nothing more than a sophisticated, formal integration of color, texture, and form. Certainly it is all that, but to delve no further is to invest only in the qualities residing in the work and to neglect the state of mind awakened by it. An appropriate analogy would be to appreciate the work of a great composer by admiring the refinement of the notation in his score, while ignoring the music that is made by those notes. There is nothing so sterile about Kaneko's work as simply formal notation; to appreciate it fully is to admire what is in the work and to contemplate what arises because of it.

What is consistent in Kaneko's art is its tenacious inconsistency. The work confronts us with so many apparent contradictions of such interwoven complexity, it defies singular categorization. (Attempting to do so recently, a curator at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts wrongly labeled Kaneko's work "Minimalist."[1]) Everything is in flux, from the mediums and materials Kaneko employs to the compositional style and subject matter. Here are some examples:

Early in 1981, Kaneko exhibited his work at the Walter Phillips Gallery in Banff, Canada. The exhibit included ceramic and mixed-media sculptures, a series of collaged drawings (lighography and painted acrylic), a large painting that was actually a spontaneous combination of several smaller paintings, and a number of ceramic plates that included his spiral, double-plate pieces and a more recent series of simple oval plates in which pattern and color predominate.

Immediately following the exhibition, Kaneko traveled to Seattle to work for several days at a glass workshop. He interacted freely and comfortably with a dozen glass artists, collaborating on the production of large, cone-shaped glass sculptures. In the midst of this activity, Kaneko worked simultaneously on a number of drawings. In one memorable moment, he dumped his box of pencils, pastels, oil sticks, and crayons onto a drawing, mashed them into the paper with his foot, and then took a blow torch to the disheveled surface to melt it into its final form. Dissatisfied, he held the drawing to the open portal of the blast furnace to produce a final transformation.

A few months later, at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, Kaneko exhibited his stately, rigidly formal sculpture, *Parallel Sounds*, which he had produced that summer at a commercial tile factory, Otsuka Ceramics, in Japan. *Parallel Sounds* consists of three diamond-shaped, monochromatic sculptures (red, blue, and yellow), each measuring 84 by 156 by 72 inches, constructed from perfectly straight, seven-foot ceramic bars stacked on top of one another. In marked contrast to much of his earlier work, *Parallel Sounds* was a tour de force of minimalist sculpture.

In 1982, again at the Walter Phillips Gallery, Kaneko, Tony Hepburn, and Faye Munroe occupied the gallery as their studio for three weeks. Kaneko first constructed a pool of water across the gallery's main entrance, contained in a structure of sheet plastic and wood; proceeded to make a large series of drawings with oil sticks that responded to the mountain environment surrounding Banff; and then followed with a number of whimsical, mixed-media sculptures and postcard collages. Finally, he painted and altered Hepburn's work, after the two artists had agreed to switch studios.[2]

These events and the works they involve suggest that one has to move quickly and with great flexibility to keep pace with Kaneko's art. He will always respond to an opportunity to work in a new forum, as he is challenged, rather than intimidated, by different mediums and materials. And he inevitably rises to the occasion, as he did a few years ago, for example, when he designed and produced vests and tote bags at the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia.

Kaneko's work is too mobile to have it labeled as any one thing. One has to be able to move from ceramic to fabric, from the deliberate and refined to the spontaneous and chaotic, from the examination of function to perceptual illusion. That Kaneko moves through this alchemical maze with such intensity and apparent ease is surprising. It is all the more surprising that we do, too.

There is, however, another important feature that is consistent in Kaneko's work, that makes sense of all this diversity: the pervasive use of pattern (stripes and sometimes dots) and color. These elements have been present in his work from the very beginning, which suggests that Kaneko has found something in them that is as sustaining and as provocative as his restless exploration of mediums and styles. On one level, he has come to understand the limitless potential of pattern and color to alter and enhance the formal aspects of his work: surface, line, shape, and space. On another level, they have become the metaphoric vehicles for his subject matter,

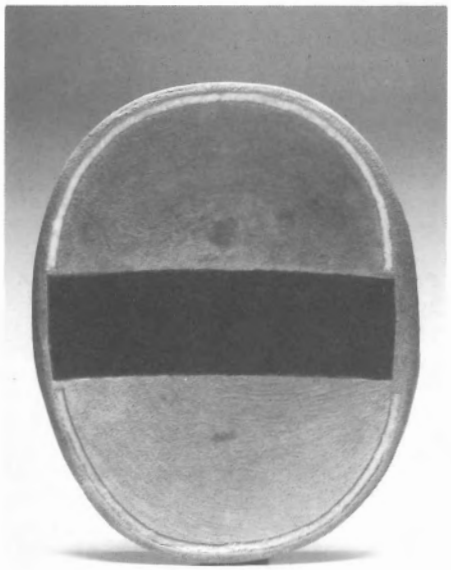


Plate (1981), 24" (60 cm) long. Photo: P. Drickey.

and it is here that the transition from what is in the work to what arises because of it takes place. Kaneko has evolved a language of stripes and color that carry human perceptions into the realm of subjective experience. What has happened is that the persistent, frenetic energy and curiosity in Kaneko's work has been harnessed and then amplified by the illusive consistency of pattern and color.

What is surprising, and sometimes problematic, about the sophistication of Kaneko's stripes and colors, is how direct and simple this complexity really is. In his ceramic plates, for example, stripes appear as large, individual bars, as narrow repeating lines, or as single-line spirals. They rarely develop into complex layered patterns. Similarly, the colors are monochromatic, bold, and isolated or clearly defined from one another. The simplicity of this formal virtuosity can be so seductive that we do not think to look for a deeper content. Yet, it is precisely this cognitive economy, in its metaphoric transformation, that makes it possible for these seemingly limited stripes and colors to spread their power over a broader range of experience. Kaneko has learned how to use these elements with an economy that brings form and subject matter into equilibrium, which permits his desired content to emerge. In other words, Kaneko is that rare artist whose subject is not the stuff of art—"color" or "landscape" or "clay"—but the experience of it. And in order to experience his art fully we must be as inquisitive as he is. When we consider the importance of Kaneko's work, or evaluate its success, this is exactly where Kaneko would have us look. He touched on this in an interview with curator Linda Cathcart:

LC *One thing which has always fascinated me about you is your intense curiosity, which is so unlike many other American artists who do not want to use other's ideas, but rather strive for originality.*

JK *Western culture is based on originality and Eastern culture is not. The basic idea is to absorb it all. You are part of nature and to understand yourself you have to understand nature . . . . to understand the sound you have to understand the silence. Then you have much more freedom to create different kinds of sound.*[3]

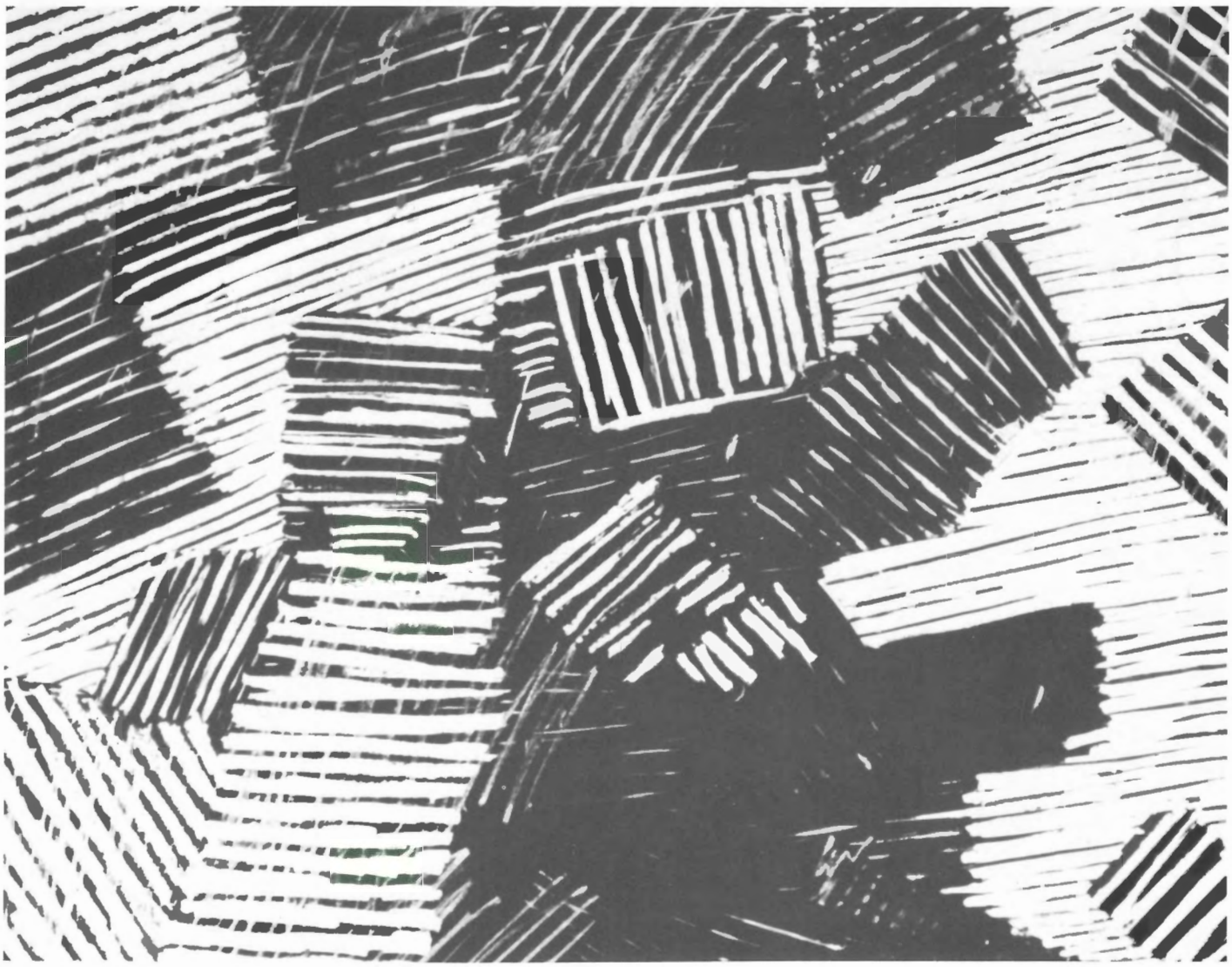
Kaneko aspires to an experience of the sublime. The intellectual satisfaction, the formal seduction, and the frenetic energy in his work is transformed into subjective experiences of nature and of our inherent place in nature: harmony, order, chaos, suspension of time, animation of space, beauty, and pain are manifest. These experiences are made possible by the simplicity, or cognitive economy, of his work. In his ceramic plates, for example, the perceptual devices (stripes and colors) may prescribe certain directions for subjective response, but it is the silence between the sounds—"the elimination of irrelevant material from the work," to use Kaneko's own words—that provides a place for the viewer within the work. This empty place, by alluding to an unconditioned totality, is what inspires the viewer's imagination to experiences of the sublime. To quote:

In experiencing the sublime, the imagination seeks to represent what it is powerless to represent, since the object is limitless, and thus cannot be represented. This effort and this inevitable failure of the imagination are the source of the emotions that accompany the sublime, which achieves its effect by the opposition between the object and our faculties of knowledge. . . . The sublime is the name given to what is absolutely great, and the absolutely great is "what is beyond all comprehension great." . . . Hence, the sublime is that, the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense.[4]

By aspiring to this experience, the content of Kaneko's art functions in a realm that is separate from the field of rhetoric. Knowing this, Kaneko never talks about it directly, nor does he like the idea of specific works being analyzed or dissected at this level. Nevertheless, an evaluation of his work is necessarily centered on this experience. In Kaneko's most successful work, this deeper content reveals itself with a rhythmic aura and a quiet power. But if this is mysticism, it is of a familiar kind; its means are straightforward, honest, and therefore accessible.

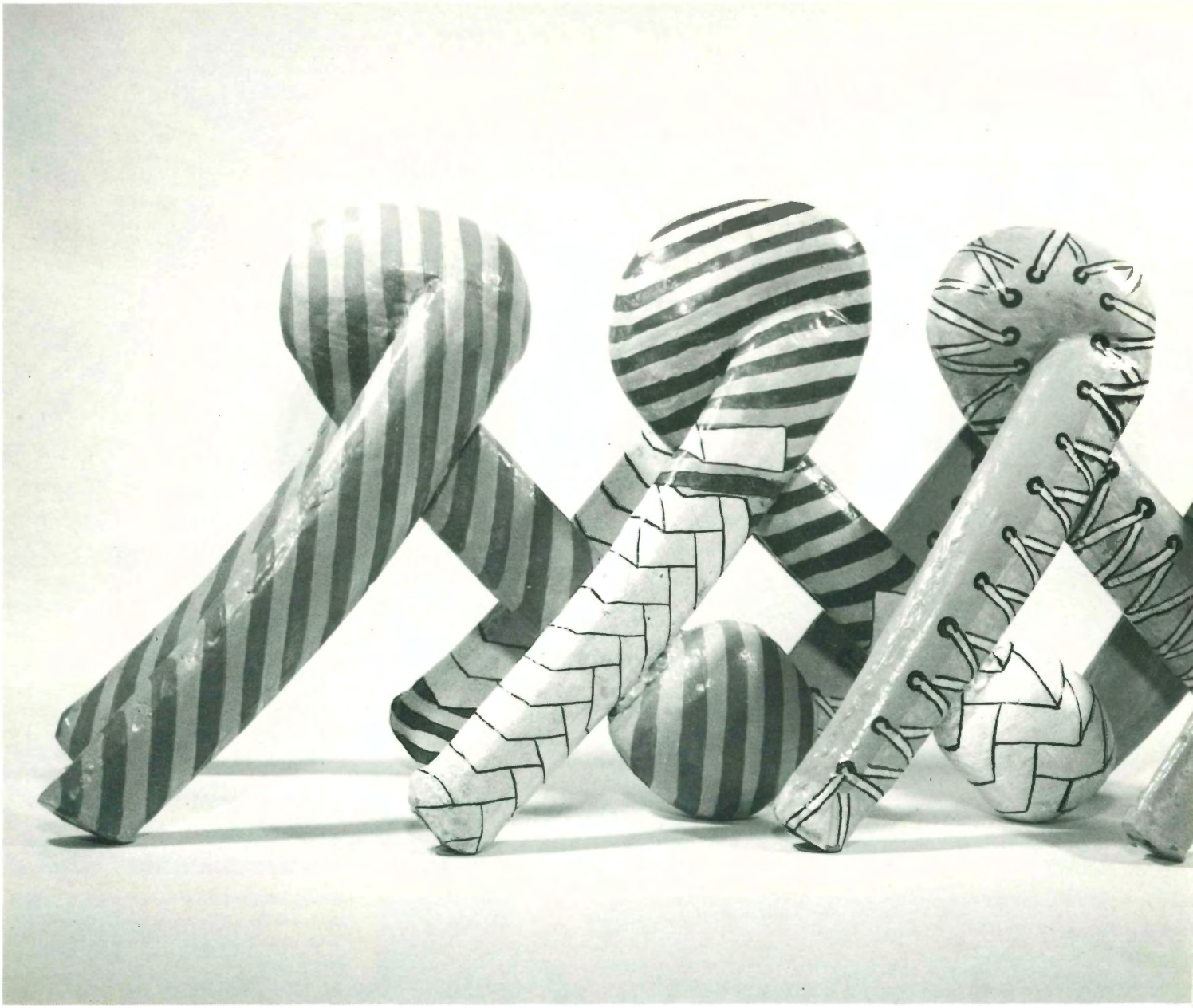
In reviewing Kaneko's work, not all of it achieves this level of harmony. *Parallel Sounds*, for example, seems to employ an intellectual bridge that is, finally, too cool, too didactic, to succeed. But his recent drawings and ceramic plates do, if in very different ways. (Kaneko uses many paths to reach this deeper content because there *are* many paths.) His best drawings seem to articulate the forces of raw chaos inherent in nature; his plates evoke the harmony and order that arise from this chaos. While the drawings are powerful and challenging, his plates may come to be recognized as his greatest achievement to date, because of their very simplicity and honesty. Perhaps the balance of forces in his art can be illuminated by this statement of Evelyn Underhill: "those who 'feel to think' are likely to possess a richer, more real, if less orderly, experience than those who 'think to feel.' "[5]

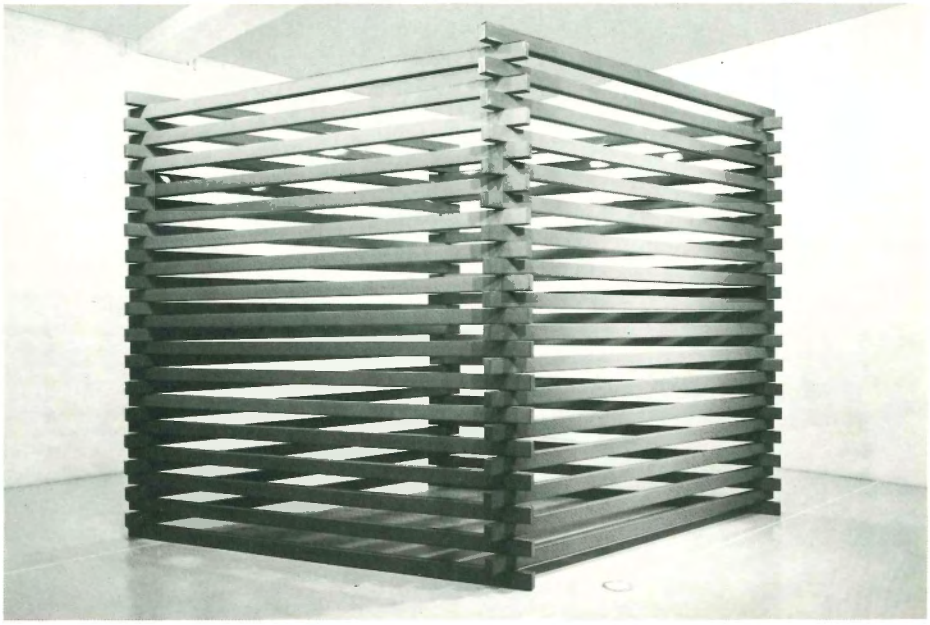
As representational art has gained currency (witness figuration and neoexpressionism), some suggest that a reëxamination of abstract art is also warranted. The way in which Kaneko moves from functional to abstract forms, from intimate objects to monumental sculpture, from one medium to another, is perhaps one indication of this new



(Above) Untitled drawing (1983), 60" x 72" (150 x 180 cm), oilstick on paper. Collection Karen and David Levin, Omaha. Photo: Vicki Loschuk.

Untitled drawing (1983), 60" x 72" (150 x 180 cm), oilstick on paper. Collection Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Photo: Vicki Loschuk.





(Opposite page) Sanbon-Ashi *(1971), 30″ (81.3 cm) high. Galleries of the Claremont Colleges, Scripps College, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Marer Collection. Photo: Schenck & Schenck Photography.*

Parallel Sound *(1981), 7′ x 12′ x 6′ (2.1 x 3.6 x 1.8 m), made at Otsuka Ceramics, Shigaraki, Japan, who supplied all materials, techniques, and labor. Photo: Shigeo Anzai.*

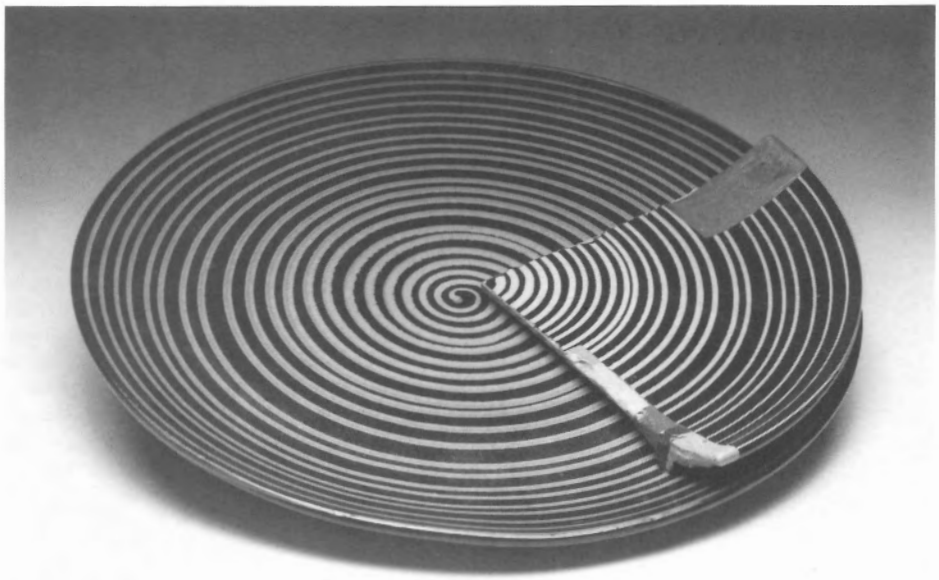
abstraction. And although Kaneko is certainly not interested in trends, in staking his claim to a region of art, he does share the desire of many contemporary artists to create work that is rooted in the everyday and the common. Kaneko alluded to this during a studio visit in 1980: "The problem with art history and criticism is that it lacks the smell of human beings." This is why the ceramic plates are potentially his greatest achievement. In them he has managed to reach a level of expression and feeling to which we all aspire, yet they are contained within a form that is ubiquitous and familiar to all. Kaneko's art is a series of surprises; we are always seeing things in it we take for granted in other contexts. This is not art arising from socially influenced interpretation, it is Kaneko's imaginative interpretation of experience. It is most successful when it achieves the sublime—when, psychologically, it seems to have the capacity for moral ideas, when common frustrations and desires, transcending all politics, are evoked. In doing so, Kaneko's art reveals a compassion and a consideration for other human beings, especially the human desire to achieve or experience something greater. The mechanisms for these experiences are embodied in the concept of effective surprise, which the English psychologist Jerome Bruner articulated in two essays on experience and creativity. He suggests:

What is characteristic of a great work of art is that its metaphoric artifice, its juxtapositions, have not only surprise value but also illuminating honesty. . . . Effective surprises seem to have the quality of obviousness about them when they occur, producing a shock of recognition following which there is no longer astonishment. . . . The triumph of effective surprise is that it takes one beyond common ways of experiencing the world.[6]

Bruner's comments not only describe aptly the power of Jun Kaneko's art, but also strike at its heart, because the nature of effective surprise in the content of his work is rooted in its deep humanity and upward aspiration.

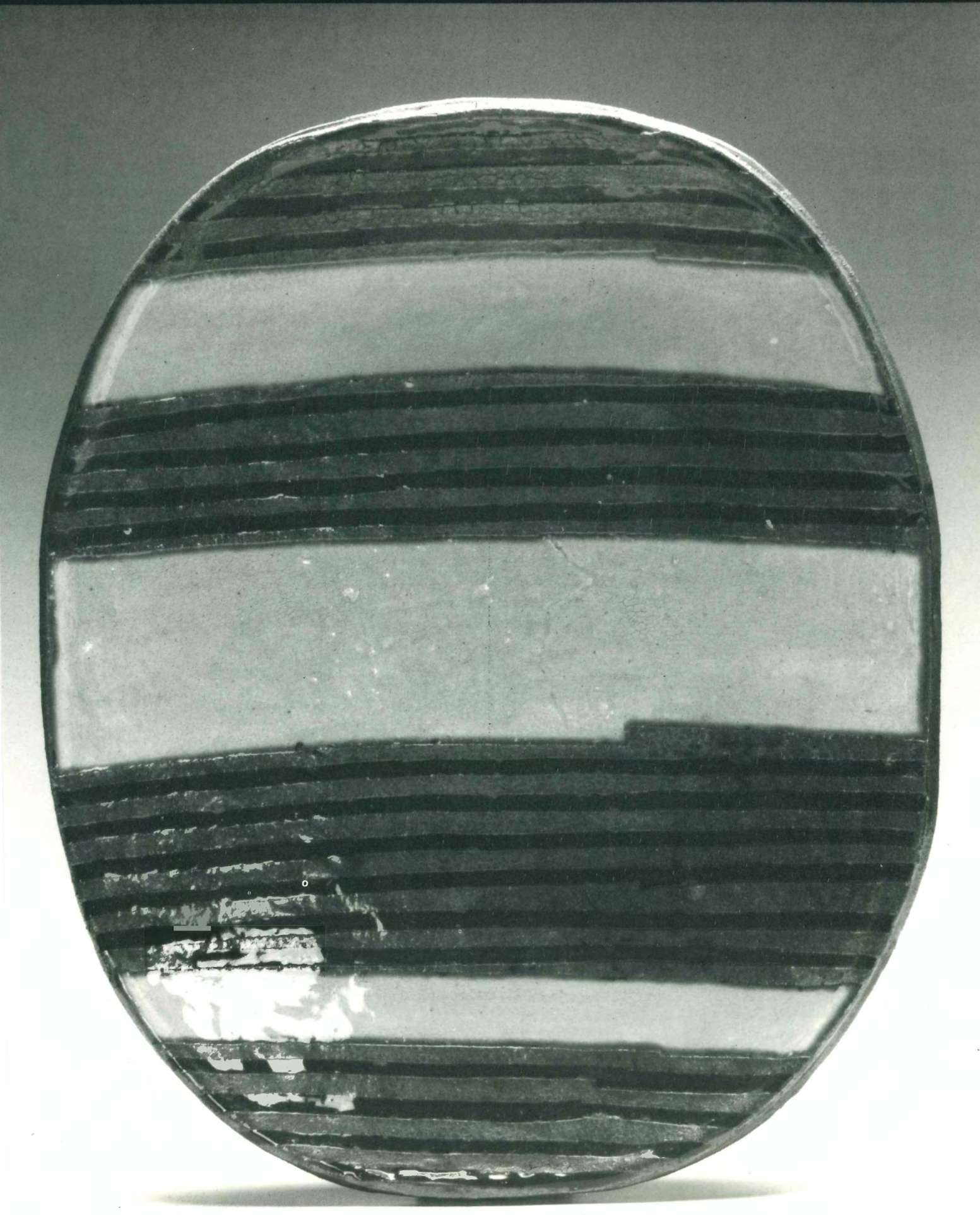
1. This was the only reference to Kaneko's work in the title panel for the exhibition, "Directions in Contemporary American Ceramics," organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and exhibited during the 1984 NCECA conference (February 25–June 3, 1984).
2. "Convergent Territories—The Gallery as Artist's Studio," Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, Canada (October 19–November 7, 1982).
3. "Jun Kaneko: Parallel Sounds," Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (September 4–October 18, 1981), extract from the brochure catalogue for this exhibition.
4. Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 7.
5. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: New American Library, 1974),p. 48.
6. Jerome Bruner, *On Knowing—Essays for the Left Hand* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 14, 18, 22.

Lorne Falk is curator of the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts, Banff, Canada. All photographs courtesy Ree Schonlau Gallery, Omaha. In addition to Ree Schonlau Gallery, Jun Kaneko's work has been the subject of recent exhibitions at Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia; Greenberg Gallery, St. Louis; Heath Gallery, Atlanta; Klein Gallery, Chicago; Morgan Gallery, Kansas City; Takagi Gallery, Japan; and Quay Gallery, San Francisco.



Double Plate (1978), 26" (65 cm) diameter. Collection Dr. Terrence Kolbeck. Photo: P. Drickey.

Plate (1982), 23" (57.5 cm) long. Collection Dr. Joseph Hoagbin, Omaha. Photo: P. Drickey.



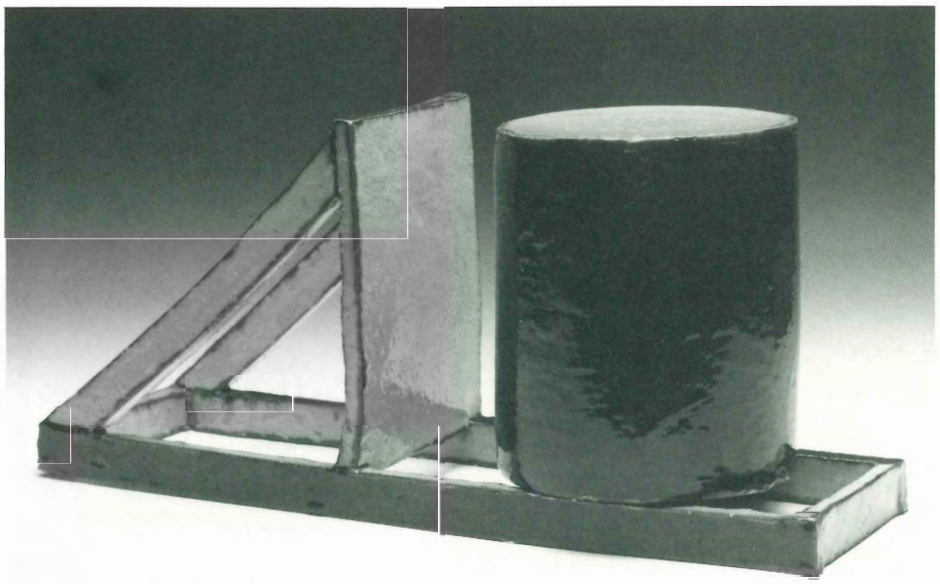
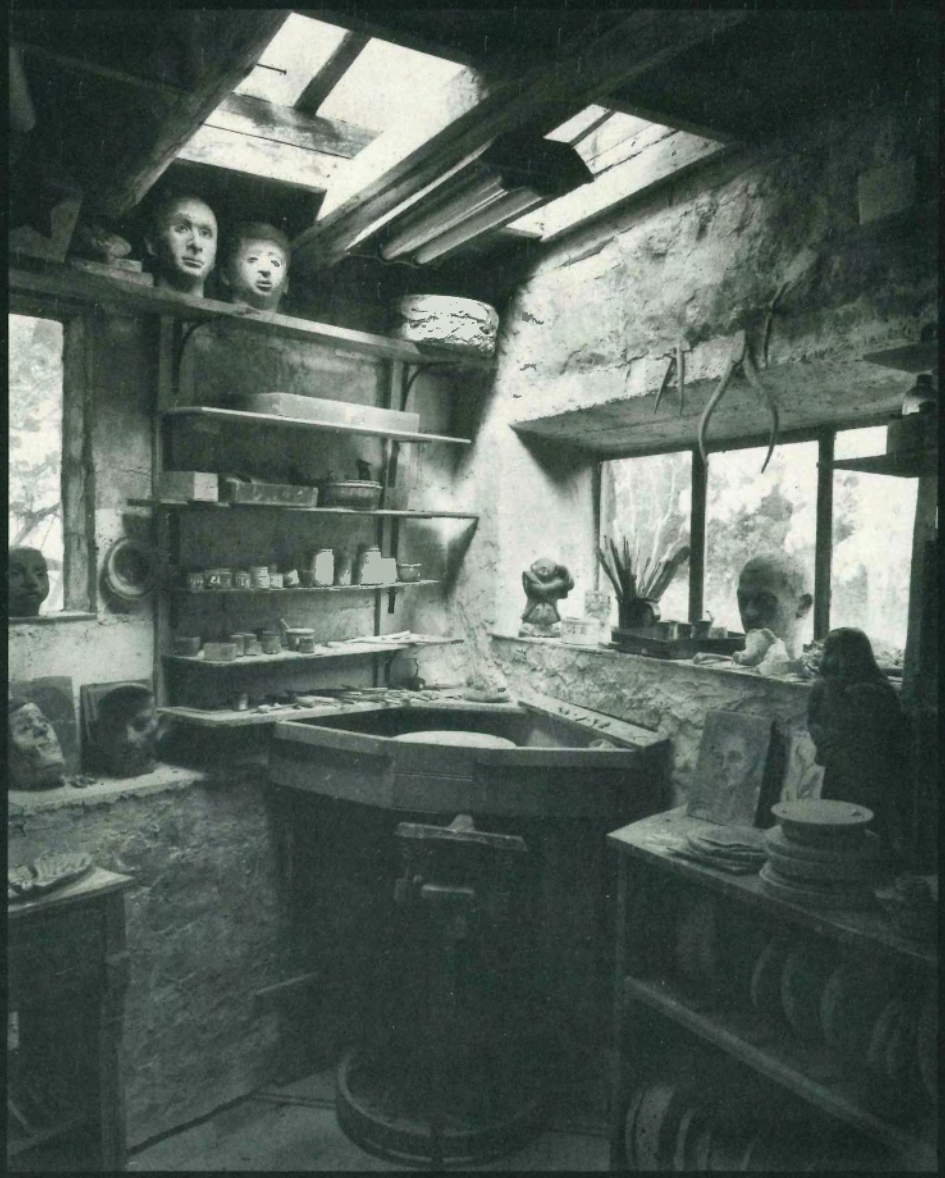


Plate (1983), 24" (60 cm) long. Photo: P. Drickey.

Untitled (1984), 21" (52.5 cm) long. Photo: P. Drickey.



Henry Varnum Poor

Edward Lebow

Glance through art magazines from the 1930s, forties, and fifties and you will probably come across Henry Varnum Poor. On one page the author, on another the subject; he was largely on his own as a ceramist, yet lumped with Edward Hopper, Charles Burchfield, Isabel Bishop, and Raphael Soyer as a painter. A realist, he was among those American Scene artists who, with the rise of abstraction, slipped into the gray folds of history. The last ten years, of course, have brought a resurgence of realism and a spate of reassessments. In this reparative spirit, retrospectives—decent burials for living artists—tend to become errands carrying posthumous mercy to those who are dead. And in Poor's case, the mercy comes apologetically, muttering that he "coulda been a contenda" had fickle cultural forces not kept his handiwork from the limelight. Whether he in fact deserves to be ranked beside Hopper, as one of his chroniclers says, is questionable, but other facts are not.

He was born in 1887 and died in 1970. In this eighty-three years, he prepared a salad of paintings, varied works on paper, fresco and ceramic murals, pottery, tiles, fountains, assorted small sculptures, and about a dozen houses and studios—one of which he built for himself. He was a general practitioner of art in an age of specialists, which isn't to say he didn't envy their ability to draw a wage from some specialty. In fact, he had set out to make his way as a painter, then stumbled on a common mercantile fact. His first solo show of paintings and drawings in New York, in 1920, revealed that a mild critical success also could be a commercial dunking. That same year he was captivated by an exhibition of Cretan terra-cotta pottery. And with an eye toward making a living, he thought, "If they could do it, why can't I?" He surveyed the moribund field of American ceramics, concluded that it could be saved, and decided to do it himself.

His first ambition, he wrote in *A Book of Pottery, From Mud to Immortality*, "was to produce beautiful, common, and anonymous ware and to sell it cheaply. I wanted to flood the market with it so that people would rush to buy, knowing only that it came from 'that pottery up the Hudson near Haverstraw.'" Within a year, Poor had produced enough pottery to fill the Bel Maison Gallery at Wanamaker's department store in New York. And, as he had wished, people rushed and bought and filled his pockets so full that he went looking for a less commercial outlet. It was one thing to want to set the public's table, another to meet the demand. So Poor limited production, increased prices, and accepted a two hundred dollar monthly retainer from the prominent New York art dealer, Newman Emerson Montross. By the beginning of 1923, after his first and successful show of pots at Montross's, Poor exemplified Walter Gropius's pragmatic claim in 1919 that "Craft will be the salvation of us artists." Craft was putting bread on Poor's table.

It is tempting to say that this was as close as Poor ever got to the leading design agendas of the century, but Linda Steigleder, who curated and wrote about Poor's ceramics for his retrospective—and should know—points out that some of Poor's closest friends were leading designers of the day. He had his bathroom tiles and fixtures industrially produced, à la Bauhaus, and in the late twenties he joined fourteen other designers in founding the progressive American Designer's Gallery. His often course-grained objects, however, have the look of handmade domesticity that could have come warm from the kiln of William Morris. His hobbitlike house and studio in New City, New York, in fact, stand as a resolute yet quiet preserve of the romantic values of the Arts and Crafts movement. (He designed virtually every detail, from toilet to window.) I say quiet because Poor's art didn't serve as a taut central gear of social movement: it came without the stentorian piety that was always rumbling through the plumbing of the Arts-and-Crafters and the Bauhausers. He held heated opinions when it came to abstract art, but delivered few sermons. Early on, he realized that all round and rigid doctrines were perfectly shaped to be sieves and that, inevitably, the only thing holding water was the work itself. Consequently, his life was spent immersed in continuous conversation between his hands and eyes. To Poor, art—beginning with drawing—was the garrulous companion of experience, breezing like an aunt in the back seat about his loves, endeavors, and fascinations. Warm, informal, slightly eccentric, occasionally indecorous to a prudish eye, it dispensed a running visual commentary on whatever seemed pertinent. The landscape nesting his house, his family, friends, places he had traveled; these images were storied with an easy readability that lagged behind the more abstract European art of the teens, twenties, and thirties. Considered advanced by a few American critics in the twenties and thirties, Poor, the modernized realist, was later thought to be mulishly hauling around an arcane view of the world. Still, Poor believed in the narrative pertinence of art—that it was the messenger of the artist's special view of nature. He didn't seem to mind dullness so long as it adhered to the legible and durable grammar of natural appearances. Above all, he wasn't interested in an art that required a revised glossary every year.

This wasn't an American Rube's prattle for Realism, but the conviction of a painter who had studied at Stanford, then in London and Paris, and who early in his career had accrued relatively progressive credentials. He had seen Roger Fry's exhibition, "Manet and the Post-Impressionists," at London's Grafton Galleries in 1910, and he seemed to share Fry's opinion that the pictures of the French moderns represented "serious

Henry Poor's studio at "Crow House" (1931), New City, New York, which he built in 1920 of local sandstone and chestnut logs, influenced by French farmhouses. Photo: Courtney Frisse.

Plate with Portrait of a Woman *(1922), 8 1/4" (20.6 cm) diameter. Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase 1922, Edward C. Moore, Jr., Gift.*

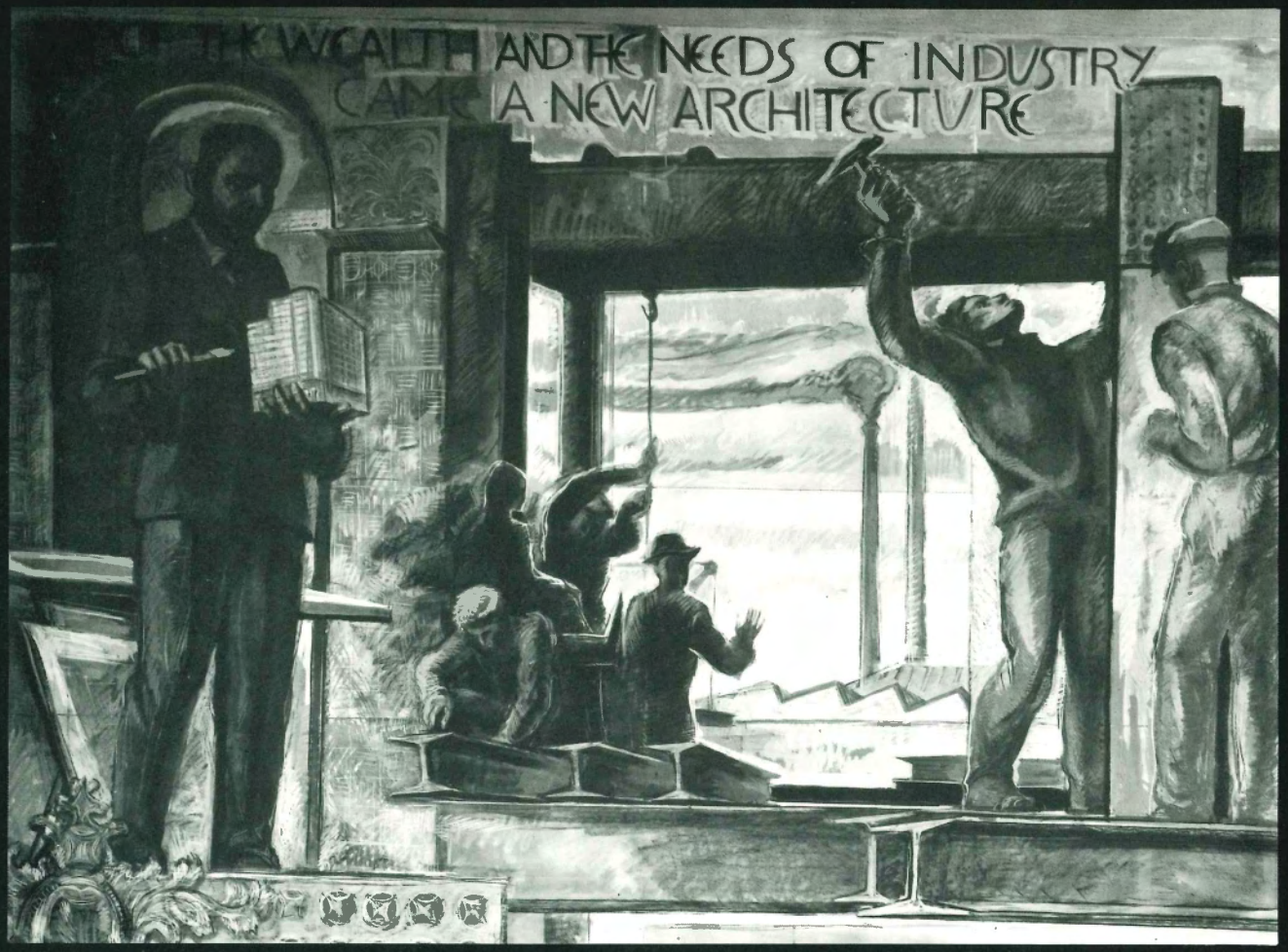
Architecture *(1943), 7 1/2' x 10 1/2' (2.25 x 3.15 m), one of two ceramic murals produced for the U.S. Uptown Post Office, Chicago. Photo: National Archives.*

efforts at a more expressive art than we have seen for several centuries." On one page alone of his notes from the show, Poor cited three paintings as "perfect." Gauguin, Van Gogh, Dégas—and later Matisse—he ranked as impressive. Cézanne, on the other hand, really knew something. Poor was convinced that Cézanne's formal experiments went about as far from depicting nature as artists should drift. He wasn't dead to abstraction (there's plenty of it in his pottery), but he feared that without the safe moorage of nature, artists risked losing sight of the ultimate destination of modern art. Its "natural development," he wrote in the brochure to his first show with Montross, lay not in the direction of greater abstraction, but "in a closer application of things more related to everyday usage."

As it turned out, of course, he was wrong, but wrong only in terms of general history. Throughout the twenties, his own work grew more congenial, if not devoted, to this belief in the fundamental practicality of art. He completed a number of major tile commissions and concentrated on pottery to the virtual exclusion of painting. By the end of the decade, he had socked away enough money to pack himself and his family off to France for a year of painting. This focused return to painting netted some small stylistic fish—brighter colors and flatter, more lyrical compositions—from the French school—and some New York critics of the early thirties nibbled happily at the work. But in the long run, I don't think there was enough to make a sustaining or interesting meal. Most of the vigor wound up in Poor's household objects and pottery.

All of Poor's works show a fascination with active textures—as though they were the very substance of life. Techniques he relied on to decorate his furniture and pottery usually found their way into his painting. Poor's interest in pigment often seemed to be more tactile than chromatic. This is clear in his frantic use of sgraffito, a technique he transferred directly from his decoration of pottery. He would bathe his pots in white slip, fire and then daub them with colors. As his technical facility developed, he preceded the white slip with a brown or black undercoating, thus enabling him to scratch through the outermost layer and render a rich, dark line. The trails of cross hatching and schools of white sgraffito that dart across the dark surfaces of his canvases amount to his own "Kilroy was here," a declaration that serves as poignant ornamentation in his objects, but often seems vague and tired in his paintings.

Poor's journalistic eye appears to have been overly burdened by the facts of verisimilitude. Painting was prickly with distortions that Poor couldn't overcome. These, he wrote, "so disconcerting in an easel picture, have a sense of rightness when arrived at through the demands of proper space-filling in decorative art." Not to gig


THE WEALTH AND THE NEEDS OF INDUSTRY
CAME A NEW ARCHITECTURE

Ceramic tile bathroom executed by Thomas Maddocks' Sons, Trenton, and exhibited at the American Designers' Gallery, New York (November 1928), which was founded by Poor and 14 other artists and designers. The bathroom was installed in Crow House in 1931. Photo: Courtney Frisse.

Plate with Nude *(1927), 12 1/4" (30.6 cm) diameter. Private collection. Photo: Courtney Frisse.*

Poor with his own out-of-context words, but he was right. The "demands of proper space-filling" required him to come up with the "right" drawing for an existing form—to do so without his constraining regard for natural appearances. After all, he wasn't treating nature, he was treating the surface of a pot.

Poor was not only more comfortable filling this prescription, he was also better at it. His beautifully drawn *Plate with Nude* (1927) has a spatial fullness that seems virtually inhabitable. The same vitality exists in his 1930 *Portrait Plate, Woman.* In these the unmarked areas at the periphery his drawing and coloring begin to work for him. Instead of resting as an inert border, they are drawn into the decoration wherever Poor didn't fully close his line—at the head in the earlier and at the left arm in the later.

As he simplified his designs, the spatial vigor of his decorations became even more dramatic. Setting aside his coloring-book approach—no longer filling color between heavy lines—he grew to rely more on the expressive power of blank areas. The roadmap outlines that dominated his early work thinned to whisps. Whisps tapered out, disappearing, into unmarked clay. He abandoned his effort to portray naturalistic space and paid closer attention to making decorative space. As a result, his drawings—particularly those on plates—moved out of the target center of the pot. They didn't necessarily spread over the entire surface, but they managed to more thoroughly involve the whole form. Instead of remaining framed within the rigid border of the rim, for instance, they interrupted it, engaged it.

What followed was the elimination of overly conscious distinctions between figure and ground, decoration and form. As is evident in *Plate with Still Life of Decanter and Fruit, Plate with Still Life of Pitcher and Melon,* and *Platter with Nude,* all from 1931, he stitched a seamless fabric of those two threads by straying further from realistic appearances than he ever allowed himself to do in his paintings. He let the spare outlines of the things he depicted overlap in transparent layers. Borrowing from Cubism, he drew the pitcher and melon as though they partially occupied the same spot. He did the same with the decanter and bowl of fruit. In these and a good many others, he abandoned trying to render nonexistent depth. Parts of things were no longer obscured behind others, presumably closer. Nothing receded illusionistically; there was almost no foreshortening. The boats in *Platter with Nude* are simply flat shapes hugging the contour of the surface.

Clearly, Poor was making his drawings truer to the pot than to life, his attention now fixed not on nature but on the requirements of the medium and the clay form. He was composing for no other purpose than to enliven a decorative space. He achieved this freedom only by overcoming the conflict—which loomed as "distortions" in his paintings—between his urge to portray nature and his urge to create a viable synthetic space. The distortions were no fewer or easier to accommodate in pottery than in painting, but Poor was able to pay closer attention to the aim of decoration. Decoration, it seems, gave him a more explicit purpose, a clearer target, one he could pursue without feeling compunction about distorting nature.

This rapport between material and conception wasn't exclusive to his pottery, but it incubated there before spreading to his other pursuits. During the thirties, his best paintings seemed to coincide with his finest pots. That decade was the last fertile oasis for American realism before the dry haul across mid-century to the seventies, and it brought Poor's canvases their greatest critical and commercial success. One critic even said they were equal to those of any master living or dead—a balloon that has shrunk over time. As a realist, he became something of a respected general, marshalling a paper war against the acceptance of abstraction. As a potter, he became a respected master, his fingers in the mud till the end. His career went on for another three decades. Inevitably, the clearest appraisal of his lifework comes by seeing it as whole stone, uncut by theory or category. Then, I think, his "general practice" appears fundamentally practical and resourceful in an era convulsed by radical invention.

Edward Lebow is a free-lance writer living in Brooklyn and a frequent contributor to American Ceramics. *"Henry Varnum Poor 1887–1970: A Retrospective Exhibition" was organized by the Museum of Art at the Pennsylvania State University. A 168-page catalogue of the exhibition is available for $16.00 postpaid from the Museum of Art Store, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802.*

Vase with Chevron Design *(1928), 14 1/4" (36.2 cm) high. Estate of H. V. Poor. Photo: Courtney Frisse.*

Plate with Melon and Squash *(1921–24), 8 3/8" (21.3 cm) diameter. Collection Martin Eidelberg, New York. Photo: Courtney Frisse.*

Exhibitions

Standing Figure with Horse No. 4 *(1983), 20" (50 cm) high. Courtesy Quay Gallery. Photo: Ralph Gabriner.*

Mary Frank

Johanna Burstein Hays

Mary Frank has never suffered the prejudice that greets most ceramists in the art world. I suspect her formal training as a painter and a dancer, and her participation in the artistic milieu she shared with husband Robert Frank, the photographer and filmmaker, prevented her New York peers from classifying her as a "ceramicist," just as her self-taught and intuitive handling of clay has aided her in directly manipulating the material to her own artistic expression.

Her sensitive use of raw terra cotta allows the clay to take on figurative forms which elaborate on the sensuousness of both clay and the figure. For Frank, her medium is not simply clay, but slabs of clay. These are manipulated to a point which equates, visually and physically, the muscular tension of the figure with the plasticity of the clay. They approximate human or animal skin and, being hollow and in need of internal support, are symbolic of the relationship between exterior and interior. The surfaces express the vitality and sensuality of animal life, while the bare bones, fragmented nature of the whole represents its temporality and fragility.

In some of Frank's monotypes and cut-paper "drawings," one can see the artist's ability to capture a gesture of emotion or movement in line. This same strength comes through in the clay work, where the surfaces flow continuously over and through the whole, translating drawing into three dimensions. This sketched or drawn quality, the creation of mass and substance without being solid, lends grace and spontaneity to her sculptures. Since she uses torn and cut slabs to construct each piece, the spontaneity of gesture, concept, and construction can resonate. The relationship between surface and structure, between supporting planes and undulating flesh, is artifice at its best. This delicate balance is not easy to maintain, however, and when it fails the work can look stiff or careless, oversimplified or incomplete.

Frank is at her best when a finger push or the ripple effect of a slab, bent so naturally, seems to replicate the folds and skeletal ridges of the body. The figure is clay and not flesh, yet so fleshlike as to erase the distinction from our minds. The pushed and folded and incised surfaces, the evidence of process, illuminate the hand of the artist and the nature of the material. This objectification of figure, through process, keeps most of the work balanced between representation and symbol.

It is when Frank overstates the symbolism of the work that its natural lyricism is jarred. The impressed leaves, fishes, faces, and hands, while sometimes successfully incorporated, seem more often to contradict the quiet simplicity and strenghth of the figure. The literalness of these drawings or impressions—so like fossils or cave drawings—are explicit statements of the bond between historic and geologic time, and remind us of our impermanent presence and impending death. Yet I fear such devices overstate the vulnerability of our humanness, which the artist so beautifully expresses in the tension between the gestural surface of flesh and the straight slabs that support it.

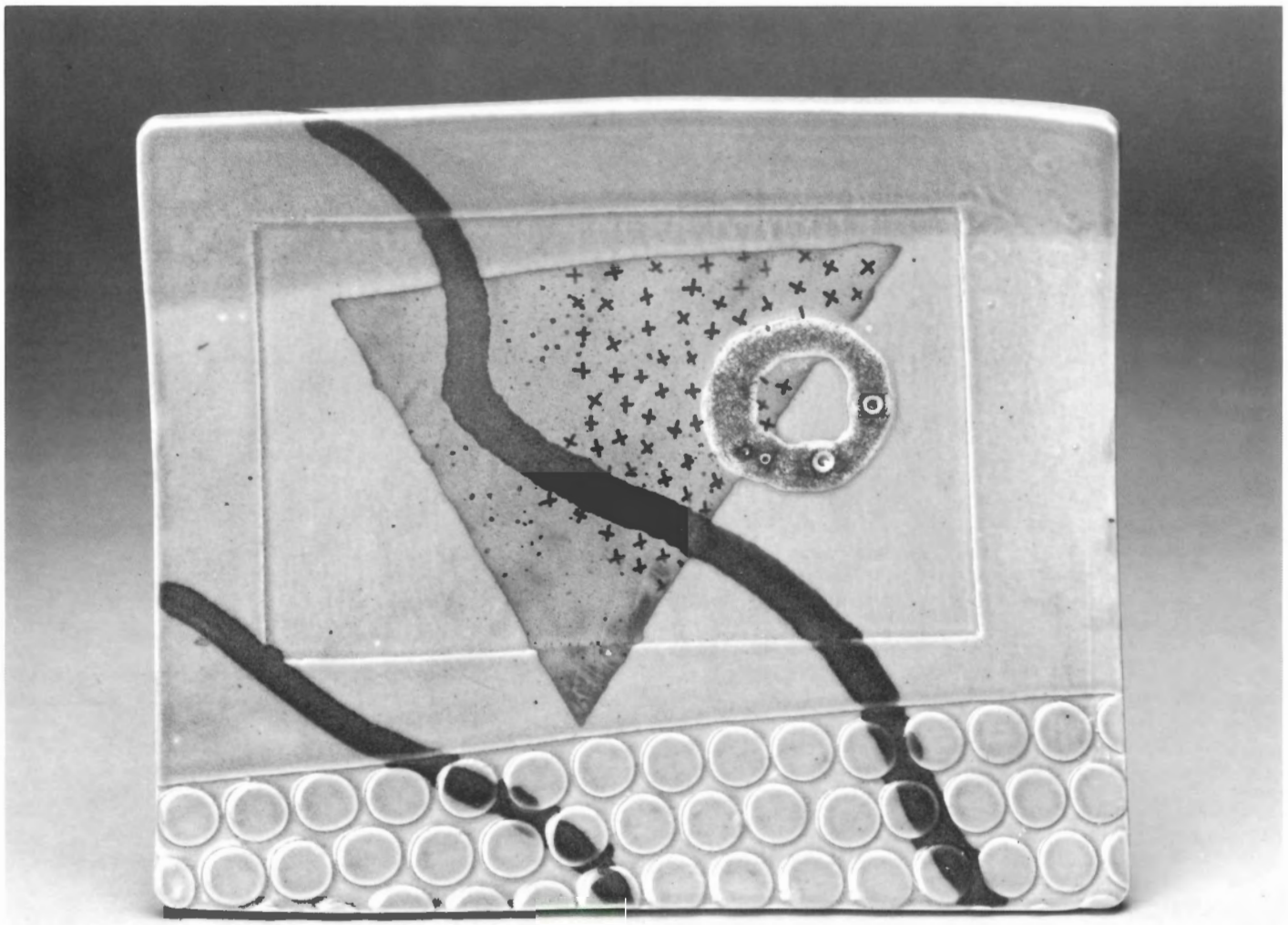
Frank's work is a balance of intuitive and cognitive functioning: of premeditation and spontaneity, of representation and symbolism, of precept and process. As in all expressionist work, it is a complex balance that can easily fail; when it succeeds, however, no art can be found that is more challenging to the artist or more rewarding to the viewer.

Mary Frank's recent work was seen at Quay Gallery, San Francisco; her work will next be shown at Zabriskie Gallery, New York (November 14–December 15).

Johanna Burstein Hays is a Bay Area critic and a frequent contributor to this magazine and to Artweek.

Ernest Hilsenberg

Matthew Kangas



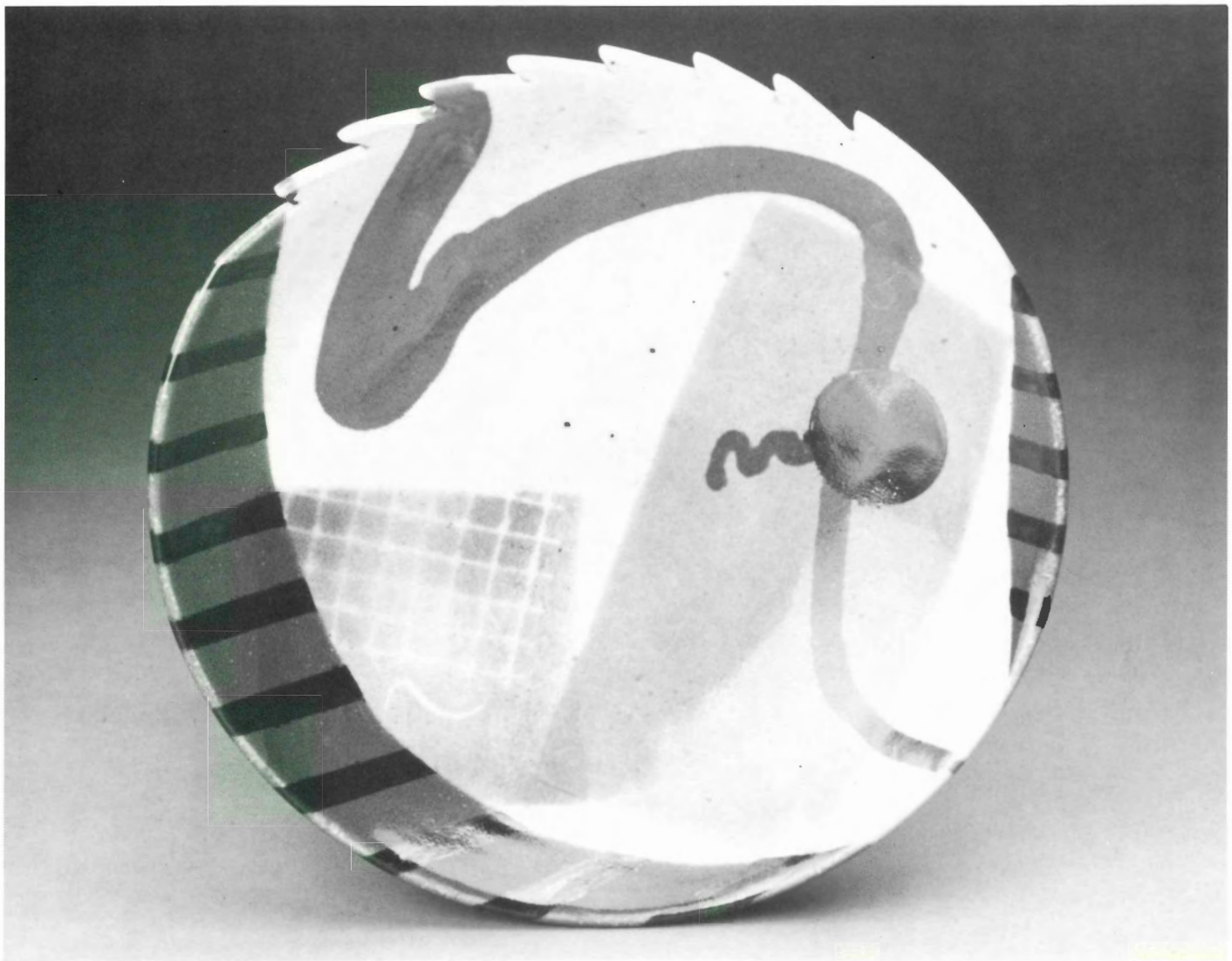
Pottery decoration seems to go in waves; like men's suiting materials, much American production ware has copied repeated patterns of checks, circles, and dots. Lately, a ceramist here and there manages to achieve a personal style that sets them apart. Most of the time, however, as little personal style as possible is reflected in the surface decoration of most pottery, resulting in decades of uninteresting tableware designs. Major exhibitions by status quo institutions (such as the American Craft Museum's 1980 tableware show) notwithstanding, one can draw the line between East Coast and West Coast, or Northwest, production-ware designers and decorators: against the strict and orderly forms and patterning of New York area potters like Byron Temple and Dorothy Hafner, readers might balance the successive generations of students of Robert Sperry, of whom the latest and most promising to appear is Ernest Hilsenberg.

A strong case could be made for a free-flowing, automatic-drawing, abstract expressionism characterizing the best of Pacific Northwest pottery decoration under Sperry's thirty-year-long tenure as head of the University of Washington's ceramics department. Hilsenberg followed some already significant Sperry disciples when he began work with the master in 1972. John Fassbinder, Gerald Newcomb, Patrick McCormick, and Regnor Reinholdtsen took various aspects of Sperry's magisterial and effortless control over the forms of plates, dishes, and cups and developed their own different but related imagery of decoration. Hilsenberg, in this his third solo exhibition, has firmly demonstrated that now he, too, is on that path toward full assimilation of Sperry's teachings and, specifically for Hilsenberg, an extension of Sperry's gestural symbols—squiggles, squares, spirals—into an equally rich and individual vocabulary of surface decoration.

Whereas Sperry abandoned color for nearly ten years only to reintroduce it a year ago, Hilsenberg has rapidly expanded a palette of hand-mixed glazes to claim a territory of grays, greens,

Untitled (1983), 12" x 18" (30.5 cm x 45.7 cm), porcelain. Courtesy Northwest Craft Center. Photo: Roger Schreiber.

Untitled (1983), 18" (45.7 cm) diameter, porcelain. Courtesy Northwest Craft Center. Photo: Roger Schreiber.



blues, browns, and rose. If Sperry is the absolutist of American ceramics who reduced color to black and white, Hilsenberg has insistently restored and reinvigorated its use. He has intensified Sperry's painterly lead beyond mere texture and gesture to create a range of chromatic definition for tableware that is especially at home in the gray and gleaming daylight of a Pacific Northwest winter.

Floating rectangles of gray over a green ground, for example, with a platinum luster square "attached" at an angle, is one design. Each plate or dish or "crock pot" shape is decorated differently. Taken one by one, each presents a subtle interplay between a given geometric shape—triangles, squares, and rectangles resembling envelopes—and adjacent details, such as the Sperryesque squiggles, spirals, or circles.

The most enterprising shift in this work, which Hilsenberg describes as a process of "continuation and refinement," is the introduction of jagged, sawtooth edges on the bowls. Never more than twelve to eighteen inches wide, the bowls have ragged, Punk cuts on the ends, which are extended to more irregular placement on some of the curved plates. The effect is graphic.

For the most part, the piling on of monumental forms, the introduction of sawtooth edges, and the more eccentric polygons of the plates create a pleasing relief from the invariably repetitive aspect of much production tableware. Occasionally, the composition falters; occasionally, Sperry's earlier work looms up too strongly as a more successful solution. Hilsenberg has surely reached a certain maturity of style here. Now one wants an enrichment of imagery that matches the mastery of glaze, color, and thrown forms.

Ernest Hilsenberg's ceramics were seen at Northwest Craft Center & Gallery, Seattle, Washington.

Matthew Kangas, a freelance critic living in Seattle, currently serves on the NEA's Art Critics Advisory Panel.

Fan with Painting *(1984), 48" (122 cm) high. Photo: Tom Lane and Michael Riley.*

Stovepipe Column *(1984), 54" (137 cm) high. Photo: Tom Lane and Michael Riley.*

Curtis Hoard

Mason Riddle

Although blanket generalizations are seldom foolproof, it is probably accurate to assert that during the past five years—if not ten—art has been drifting steadfastly away from the omnipresent grip of abstraction toward a stylistic realm favoring more representational imagery. While such generalizations appear more as the art-historical incantations of critics than as infallible assessments of style, a certain value does emerge from their use: exposing exceptions to the rule.

One such exception is the large-scale, abstractly painted, earthenware sculpture of St. Paul artist Curtis Hoard. Working with four primary shapes—"wedges," "fans," "shields," and "columns,"—the artist adds on to these basic, mold-constructed pieces to create variations on a common theme. Although the forms vary in shape and presentation—the shields and wedges are wall mounted and the fans and columns are free-standing—they are unified by an overall, abstract embellishment of the surface. For Hoard, the surface of his sculpture takes precedence over form and it is readily apparent that the act of painting these surfaces is the real challenge for him. Using engobes in muted hues ranging from neutral grays and browns to more strident shades of pink, green, and purple, Hoard approaches the clay as a painter would canvas, covering every available surface with gestural dots, drips, spirals, and splatters, as well as larger geometric forms.

Undeniably, the energized work is of its time, demonstrating the necessary gusto and agitated brushwork of contemporary expressionism, but it contains none of the rage or violent imagery usually associated with the current style. Rather, Hoard's painted sculpture is more closely connected to an earlier period, when artists were replacing recognizable imagery with abstract markings and being lumped together under the catch-all label, Abstract Expressionism. Thus, it is hardly surprising when Hoard lists Jackson Pollack, Franz Kline, or even George Sugarman for his exploration of painted forms in space in the same breath with Peter Voulkos and Robert Arneson.

Unfortunately, Hoard disrupts his seamless abstraction in certain places with the inclusion of fish or biomorphic forms. Like the dog or stag, the fish has become a tedious image in recent art through overuse, making Hoard's work appear clichéd as a result. Initially curious, or even humorous, *Fish with Tiles* or *Fifties-like Fish* exist as little more than clever exercises in the mating of two disparate forms, unrelated in meaning or aesthetic.

More satisfying, but falling short of resolve, are the wall-mounted wedge pieces. Constructed from numerous interlocking clay shards sporting loads of gestural markings, the pieces tend to dissolve into a general state of confusion. For example, the chaotic surface treatment found in *Horizontal Wedge* muddles any inherent, formal concerns, thus stifling the potential impact of the piece.

Most successful are those free-standing fans and columns that demonstrate a modicum of restraint in surface decoration. In these, the painted surface clarifies the form by emphasizing the edges and bringing attention to volume and scale. *Column with Pink Top*, which recalls either a tiered birthday cake or a phalliclike form, depending on one's perception, combines a rectangular base topped by four cylindrical shapes stacked end to end. The result is playful yet tough, due to the strength of the form and the unpredictable handling of color.

Equally compelling is the vaguely vessel-shaped *Fan with Pink Rectangle*, which draws attention not only to the edges, but to the dynamics of the form itself. The sophisticated placement of surface forms creates subtle games of illusion; where other fan pieces lack surface definition, thus neutralizing the overall effect, *Fan with Pink Rectangle* is characterized by an underlying order and stateliness.

Hoard's previous large-scale sculpture was embellished with sprays of fauna on atmospheric, airbrushed surfaces. Discontent with the increasingly decorative quality of his work, he embraced abstraction as a way of making more gutsy, visceral art. While this new work generally lacks the completeness of earlier pieces, it succeeds on a more challenging level as a way of exploring painted forms which occupy and displace space.

Curtis Hoard's work was on view at the Rochester Art Center, Rochester, Minnesota.

Mason Riddle is an art historian and free-lance art critic in the Twin Cities and Minnesota editor for the New Art Examiner.

Phillip Maberry

James B. Cobb

In the past, Phillip Maberry has used his considerable ceramic technique to produce stylishly beautiful bowls, hemispheres, and cones. He also has shown extraordinary skill in tile works. This virtuosity, of course, has its limitations, yet Maberry's recent work reveals he has been able to lessen some of these, thus achieving the quality that the decorative painter Cynthia Carlson calls "menace." Used effectively, as is evident in the works of Robert Kushner and Lucas Samaras, this quality yields a lasting, decorative impact.

In Maberry's case, it presents a stark contrast to the sherbet colors he used previously. In their place are somber pastels, earthen and metallic tones. Combined with the geometric, organic, and figurative motifs of his glazing, these colors evoke a sense of foreboding which is made even more ominous by his white-clay cones dressed with sequined and beaded fabrics. But the character of the individual pieces represents only one part of this complex show. The more central issues pit the experience of Maberry's installation as a whole versus that of the individual pieces. I encountered the latter almost immediately.

On the carpet leading from the gallery, Maberry had spread straw and small disks, the color of pastel confetti. In and around the doorway he had propped tree limbs and branches. The interior was installed with clay cones, plaques, tiles, wall fountains, and fabrics. The walls, covered with speckled blue, black, and blue green patches, contributed to the ultimate unification of the various parts of the installation. However, the impact of these "unifiers" was limited. Maberry's approach is excessively fragmented, piecemeal. And if we consider successful installations by Judy Pfaff, we'll see why. Pfaff works and reworks all the components of her installations. The result is a cohesive visual experience of disparate parts, much the same as that achieved by her mentor, Al Held. Held's paintings are the epitome of organized confusion, so well orchestrated that the viewer must scrutinize the canvas to discern the underlying discontinuity. Maberry is far too timid. As a result, his incomplete and largely unsatisfying display—though the straw was amusingly slippery—failed to convey any clear structure binding the heaps of disparate things. Instead, the arrangement appeared gratuitous. Where I had hoped to find some guiding sense of order, there was only a showroom of juxtaposed objects with no clear visual relationships.

As for the individual pieces, Maberry followed no consistent decorative approach. He apparently reached his profusion of decorative motifs through trial and error. In that sense, the work is unresolved. But this is nothing new. Judy Schwartz, reviewing earlier Maberry work (*American Ceramics* 1/2), put her finger on it, describing his objects as formally weak, but decoratively strong. He was able to partially solve the designs' problems by borrowing from Chinoiserie styles. Since then, he has relied on various styles of Caribbean folk decoration while pursuing his own solutions. But, as I said, these solutions appear to be incomplete. My hope is that their eventual resolution will yield a tougher, more penetrating approach to decorative form, one that will effectively convey the inchoate sense of menace lurking in his most recent work.

Phillip Maberry's work was shown at Hadler/Rodriguez Galleries, New York.

James B. Cobb is a sculptor living in New York, who teaches at The New School and Hunter College.

Cone in Niche *(1984), 39″ (99 cm) long, ceramic, sequins, glass beads, fabric. Courtesy Hadler/Rodriguez Galleries.*

(Detail) Shangri la di da *(1984), 8 1/2′ x 11′ (2.59 x 3.35 m) overall, ceramic, copper tubing, water. Courtesy Hadler/Rodriguez Galleries.*

Gattuso Lo Monte

Matthew Kangas

Giuseppe Gattuso Lo Monte has been exhibiting in the United States since 1972, but this was only the second showing of his ceramic sculpture on the West Coast. Living and working in Tuscany, he is a founder of the Santa Riparata Printmaking Workshop in Florence. In addition to his graphic works—which are of a very high quality—his sculptures combine wood, glass, stone, and metal with terra cotta.

The Risser Gallery showed the ceramic sculptures to very fine advantage and it is those which are the subject of this review. Although America's current interest in Italian art centers on figurative work, it is important to remember the other sides of contemporary Italian art: the landscape artists, the realists, and the abstractionists. Gattuso Lo Monte's clay works are variations on abstracted landscapes. The unusual thing is that seeing them while one is in Tuscany, as I did, they seem closer to being realistic in style. That is, though they are fantasies or reveries upon landscape, the landscape itself in each piece is unmistakably that of ancient north central Italy. And in that sense, there is little of the transposer or refiner of Nature in Gattuso Lo Monte; in another, more important sense, they carry away with them from Tuscany a quality of ordered natural harmony and of a landscape reflecting in its imagery the very earth out of which it was made. It is in this way that Gattuso Lo Monte is a very modern artist for his union—*indivisibilità*—of material and content is purely modernist. What else could a collage about Paris newspapers be made of than the torn papers themselves? Similarly, what better material for making small tabletop Tuscan landscape vignettes than the chunks of the earth—*la terra toscana*—itself?

Usually, the forty-six-year-old Sicilian-born sculptor begins with the rich red *terra crudo* and constructs each element separately: base, plinth, backdrop, tree, house, or figure. Most are then fired and painted with tempera afterward. Some are brushed with colored slips before firing. The results are objects that imply an entire countryside, but distill it so well that an independent

Manzil Yûsuf *(1970), 17 3/4" (45 cm) high, terra cotta and wood. Courtesy Risser Gallery. Photo: Aurelio Amendola.*

Made in Sicily *(1975), 14 1/2" (37 cm) long, ceramic and stone. Courtesy Risser Gallery. Photo: Aurelio Amendola.*

landscape of its own is set up: Gattuso Lo Monte's landscape of the mind. Only he can make a house look like a coffin, or a building façade look like a tombstone, or a tree look like a man, or a square with scored lines look like an entire vineyard seen from the air. *Manzil Yûsuf* (1970)—three houses surmounting three hills before which three boats sit on the "bay" of the sculpture plinth—is more suggestive of human community than the crowded loneliness of the Tuscan hills. For most of the time no one is in sight; and, as is true in Tuscany and much of Italy today, despite acute housing shortages, many farmhouses of stone with terra-cotta tile roofs lie abandoned and unoccupied. It seems to me that this is part of Gattuso Lo Monte's meaning. That is, by making objects of clay, which by its nature can mimic the look of antiquity, or by emphasizing a simple arrangement of forms or a series of ardently scratched lines, he has made art that belongs in the company of Morandi or Giacometti.

The clay pedestals often play an important role in the works' impact, for the artist seems to delight in adding supporting shelves, slab upon slab, which sit upon yet another set of slabs when seen in Italian art galleries—the polished terra-cotta tile floors. Thus there is a subtle, typically dry Tuscan humor at work here, too. Despite their diminutive size—most under two feet—and their frequent repetition of steps, shelves, and little clay backdrops displaying objects of ambiguous definition, there is enough clarity of placement, economy of line, and sensuality of color and texture to avoid falling into the tiny-object/figurine category in which we classify most historical examples of ceramic sculpture.

Giuseppe Gattuso Lo Monte's sculptures were seen at Risser Gallery, Pasadena, California.

Peter Vandenberge

Johanna Burstein Hays

La Belle Falconiere *(1982), 33 1/2" (85 cm) high. Courtesy Quay Gallery. Photo: Roger Gass.*

Coil upon coil, Peter Vandenberge builds elegant abstracted busts of exotic figures. These are not realist works; the repetitious patterning of the coiling process brings primitive vessel associations to these otherwise sophisticated forms. Not portrait, not vessel, not monument; Vandenberge combines all three in subdued and enigmatic figures that simultaneously speak of humanistic individuality and remote monumentality.

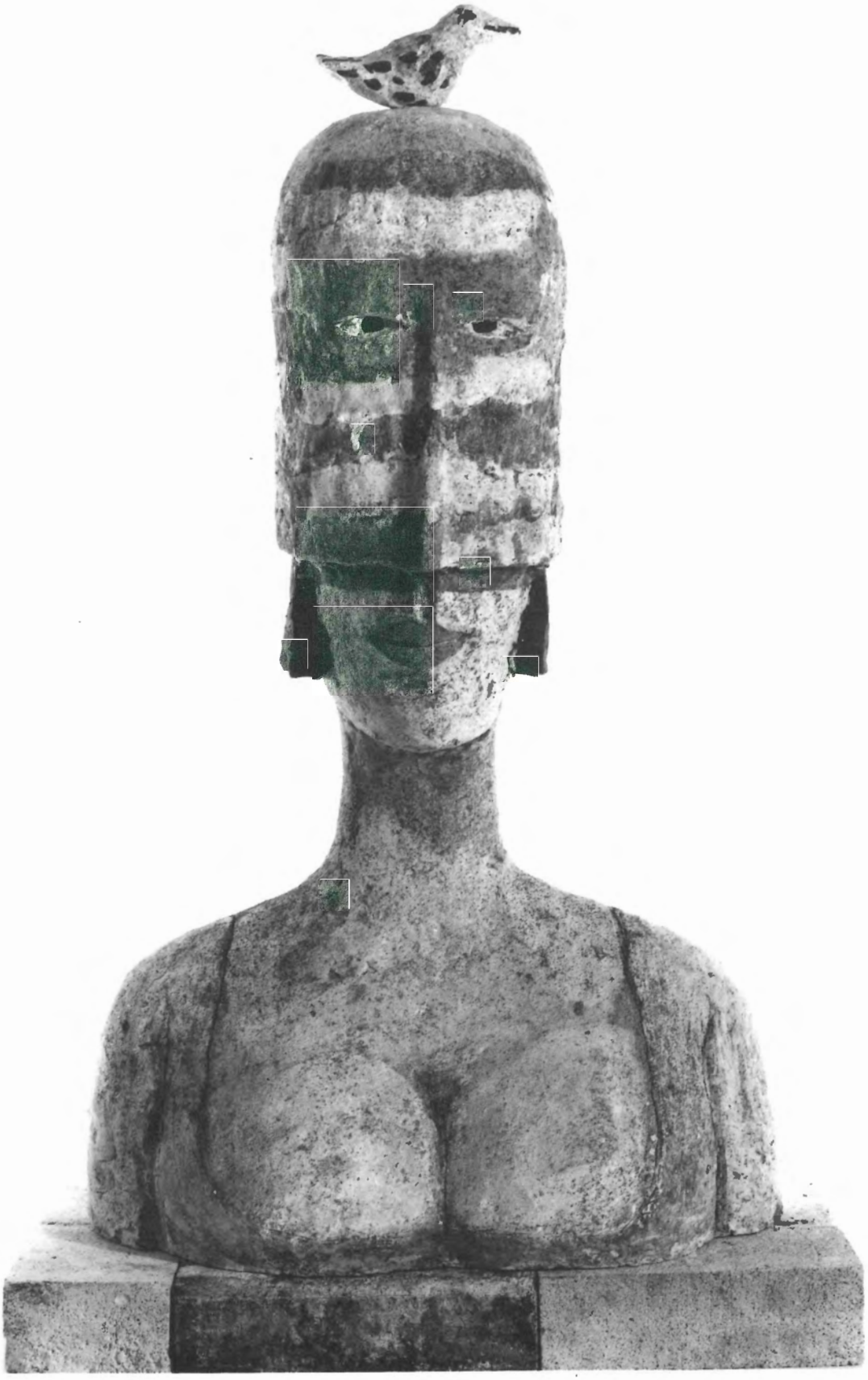
Each bust has a solemn, resolute expression, conveying a Buddha-like distance from us and from our time. This otherworldliness is contradicted and humanized, however, by the explicit and decidedly Western detailing of features, hair, and costume. In *Aviator*, for example, the serene self-reflectiveness of the pilot's slanted, half-closed eyes and the hat flaps resembling attenuated earlobes remind us of India's Buddhas, but the jaunty aviator cap and pastel bands of pink and blue deflate such piety, bringing a smile to our lips.

It is, in fact, the slow subtle humor in these works that is pivotal to their success and accessibility. They are so large, so self-contained, so reminiscent of ancient stone monuments that they feel like artifacts, yet aren't. They sport nineteen-twenties attire and hairstyles, they have the closely observed details of portraiture, and they are clearly handmade from malleable material. They are make-believe artifacts from a storehouse that values the personal and the eccentric, the friendly and the familiar, more than the exalted and the ominous. There is also an interesting contradiction in scale. If these were full figures and not busts, they would be at least eight feet tall. But by restricting their size to four feet, Vandenberge avoids the alienating scale of monumentality. Being icons of the secular, they are suitably kept to human dimensions, and so retain human intimacy.

The vessel associations of Vandenberge's technique also humanize the implied monumentality. Crudely handcoiled like some primitive pots of Africa and the Americas, they are unable or refuse to leave behind the humble tradition of clay-making. This renders them more, rather than less, human. The work is so honest and direct, I find it impossible to believe any literal metaphor is intended; it is, merely, Vandenberge's expressed intimacy with clay.

The forms themselves have a streamlined elegance that is quite beautiful. Unfortunately, the elongated heads, almond eyes, and long narrow noses, which seem quite right for the work, are disturbingly derivative of Modigliani. These busts are a refined consolidation of twenty-five years' work. Their subtle grace is not what we call the "cutting edge," but they are sincere, almost stoical, in the face of all the razzle dazzle going on. They have been made to endure.

Peter Vandenberge's recent works were shown at the Quay Gallery, San Francisco.



Conversation with Air *(1984), 42" (107 cm) high. Courtesy Dorothy Weiss Gallery.*

Messenger *(1984), 18" (45 cm) high. Courtesy Dorothy Weiss Gallery. Photo: Sid Levine.*

Stan Welsh

Mark Levy

Stan Welsh's ceramic sculptures, while replete with intricately wrought surfaces, challenge the viewer's idea of ceramic prettiness with their lumpy shapes and awkward projections. Indeed, his objects often evoke a sense of uneasy sexuality and black humor that recalls the surrealist sculpture of Arp, Miró, and Ernst. Like the surrrealists, Welsh conceives sculpture in a playful spirit, allowing unforeseen elements of form and content to emerge, eschewing overrefinement for the raw energies and chance elements of his sculptural process.

From his undergraduate days to the present, Welsh has also made nonfunctional plates whose rough, pitted surfaces bring to mind Peter Voulkos's abstract expressionist endeavors in the same genre. Unlike Voulkos, however, Welsh does not appear to be working out a violent inner struggle in clay, nor are his plates completely abstract; sometimes a slipping glimpse of a figure is evident. Moreover, Welsh's carvings in the wet terra cotta range from delicate cross hatchings to lyrical ellipses and spirals, which are sponged or painted with bright, multicolored glazes. For the most part, he respects the integrity of the round or oval frame, so that these plates, notwithstanding their indentations and protruberances, approach painting or low-relief sculpture. Little wonder that Welsh also enjoys the monotype medium, especially for its painterly qualities and possibility of quick execution.

Although Welsh uses the monotype and the plate "as platforms to set myself up for the sculpture," he never knows "what may happen in this medium. . . . Sculpture is a struggle for me," he says, "it pushes me in new, surprising, and sometimes difficult dimensions. Here a kind of psychic automatism takes over and formal problems are not always resolved to my satisfaction."

Yet it is this lack of resolution that contributes to the power of these pieces. In *Geisha*, several lopsided blobs of clay hover precariously on the top edge of a misshapen monolith with surfaces of greater roughness than the plates. To my mind, Geisha is reminiscent of Arp's *Three Disagreeable Objects on a Figure* (1930), where three oddly formed objects have invaded the top of a smoothly finished and highly symmetrical bronze biomorph. Like *Three Disagreeable Ojbects, Geisha* provokes an uncomfortable smile, especially when the graceful associations of its title are taken into account.

Another aspect of surrealist sculpture shared by these objects is an obstreperous and polymorphous sexuality, which is liable to upset viewers with fixed notions of aesthetic decorum. Nearly all of Welsh's sculptures appear to be festooned with penises, testicles, and orifices: teapot spouts become penises, cones are transformed into nipples, erections pop out unexpectedly from the cores of monoliths, handles or loops create holes, bulbous shapes resemble testicles, and so forth. Nevertheless, Welsh occassionally lightens the sexual weight of his sculptures with inventive formal ambiguities.

Always Falling consists of a zig-zag base, two balls on the top points of the zig zags, two wide loops arched between these balls, and three small cones on one of the loops. Although the zig-zag base can be perceived as a bird with a beak/penis, this and other sexual allusions are sufficiently abstract to allow the viewer to appreciate *Always Falling* in other ways, along with its enigmatic markings and nonlocal colors.

Rather than taking a particular approach to the dead end of expertise, Stan Welsh is willing to experiment with a new method and style; the results justify his surrender of full control. Stylistic irregularities endow his sculpture with an individual and extraordinary presence.

Stan Welsh's work was seen at Dorothy Weiss Gallery, San Francisco, and will next be seen at Esther Saks Gallery, Chicago (October 12-November 10).

Mark Levy teaches art history at California State University, Hayward, and is a free-lance art critic living in the Bay Area.

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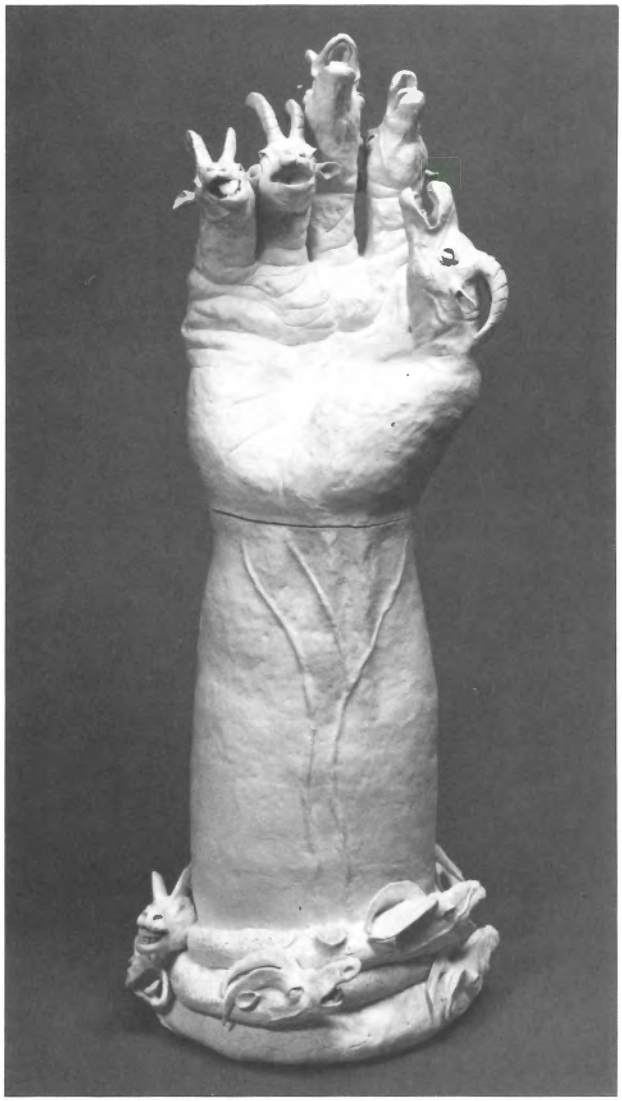

Goat Hand, (1984), 50″x20″, from the Guernica Series,
Photo: George Flemming

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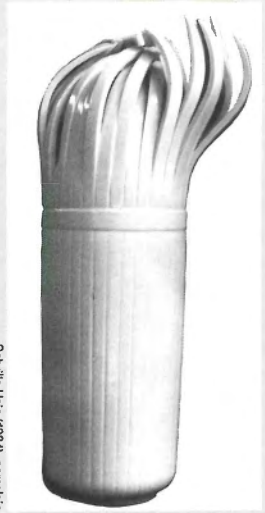

Gabrille Hain (1984), porcelain.

Arne **Ase**
Lisbeth **Daehlin**
Gabrille **Hain**
Annalisa **Silenti**
Ann **Wåhlström**

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"Powder Blue Veiled Combination Arc," 1983
Photo: Brian Westveer

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November 16, 1984–
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recent work
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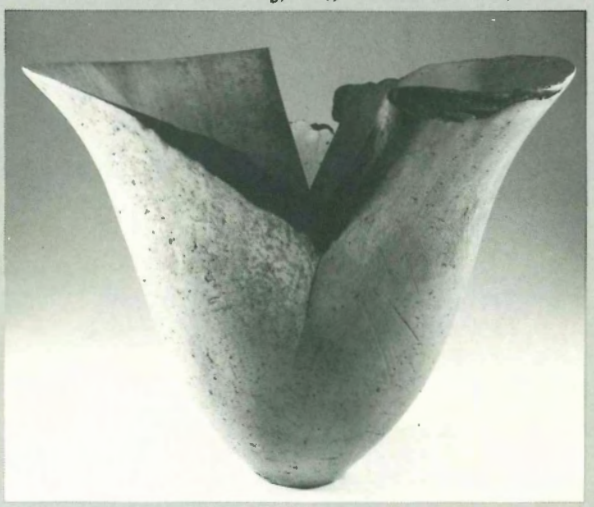
Red Earthenware Clay, 1984, 18"W x 18"D x 14"H



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Untitled *(1982) by Jun Kaneko, 20" (50 cm) high. Courtesy Klein Gallery, Chicago. Photo: Rob Micus.*

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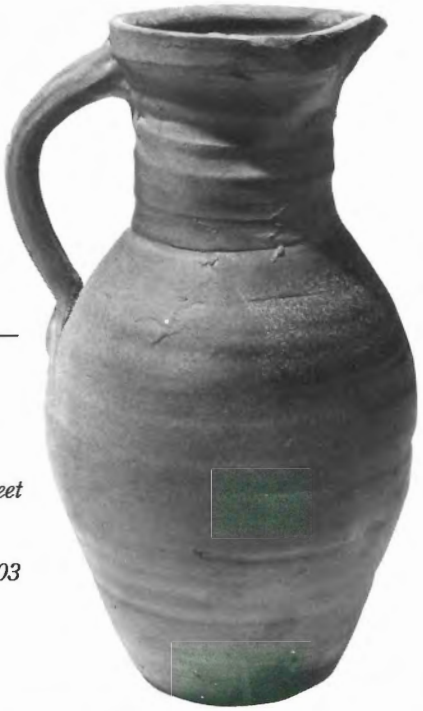

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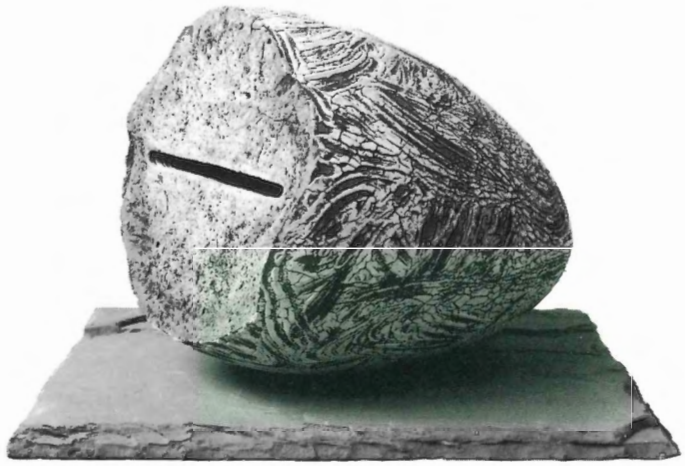
NEW WORK

NOVEMBER 1–28, 1984



Untitled, 1984, earthenware clay, coil construction, sandblasted, 27" x 30" x 33"
photo: Jamey Stillings

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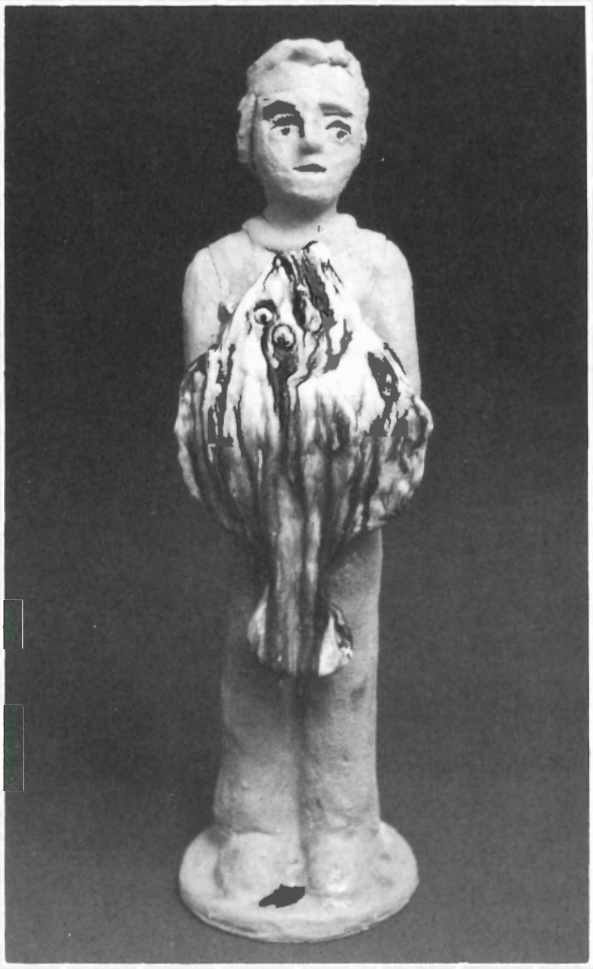

Fisherman Series (1984), 24" high

CHRISTOPHER BERTI

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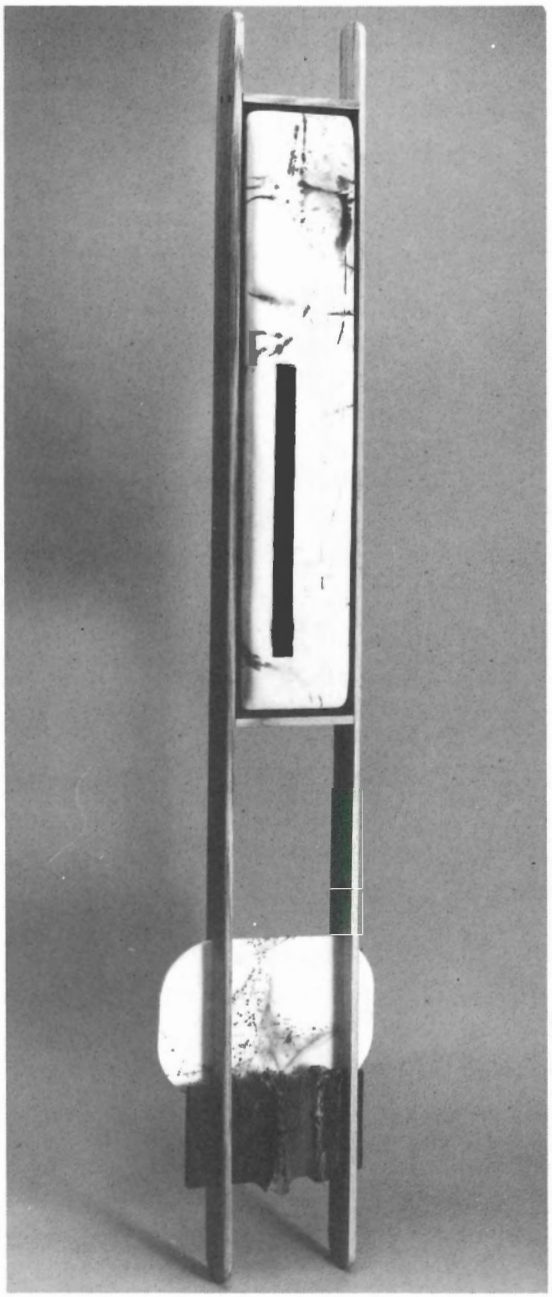
jackie chalkley



CHRISTOPHER RICHARD
september 22 - october 13
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salt fired clay set in red oak & maple

jackie chalkley

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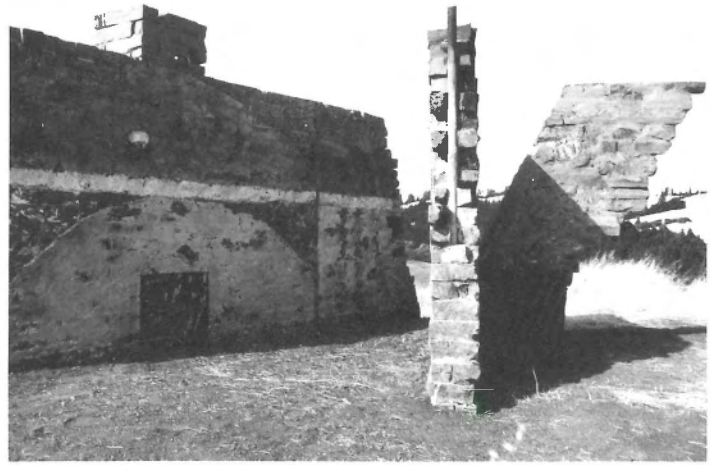

Mygon 12' x 19' x 23' Adobe with colored cement veneers.

Mygon was constructed during two months as artist-in-residence at the Djerassi Foundation, Woodside, CA., Summer 1984.

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Davis-McClain Galleries, Houston
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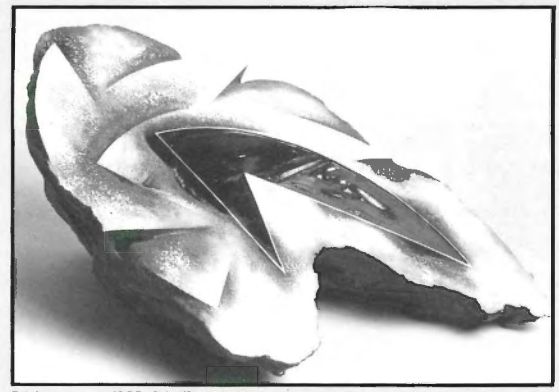

S. Heinemann, 1983-84, 53cm x 22cm

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October 16-27

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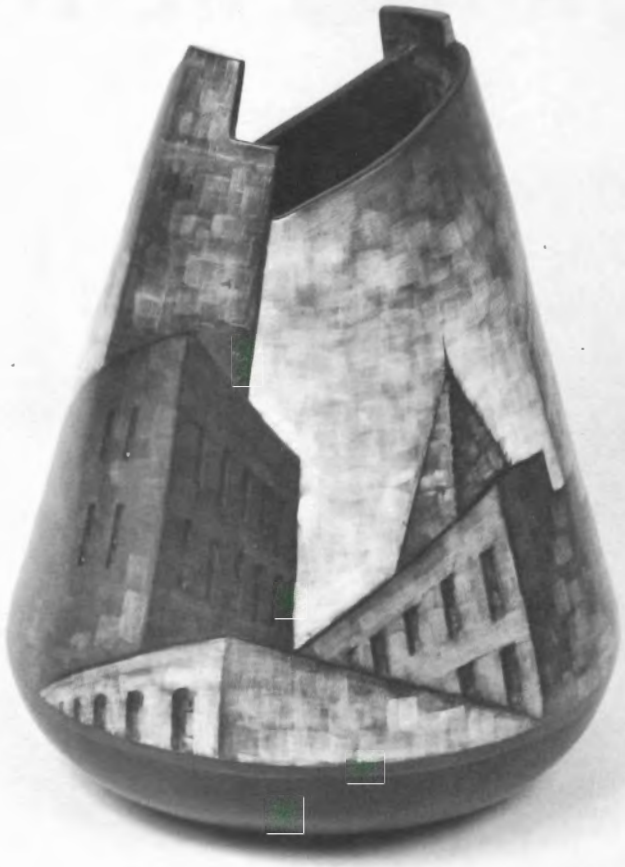
LIDYA BUZIO
November 3–
December 29



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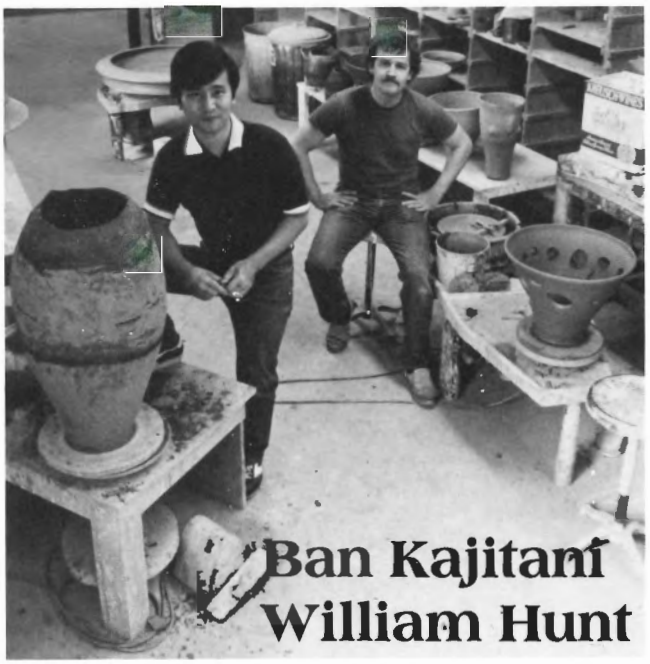

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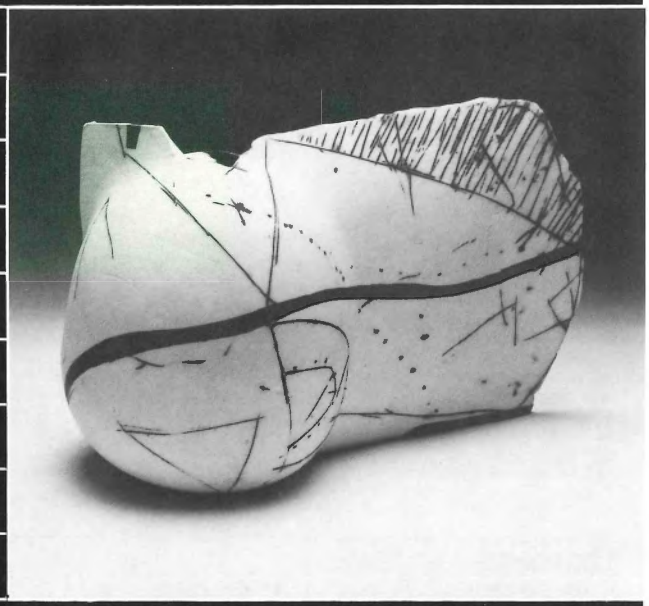

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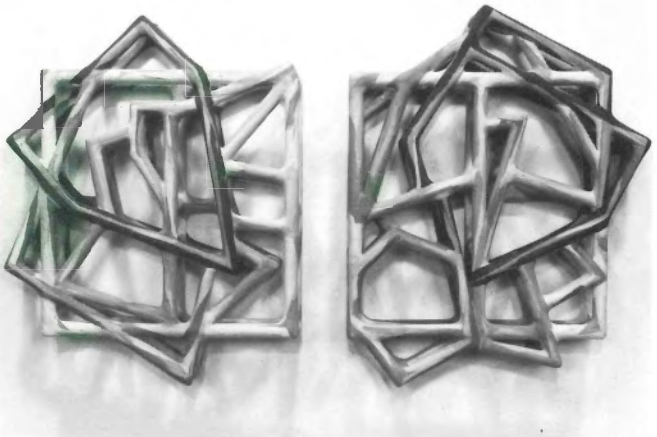

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TRANS-FORM

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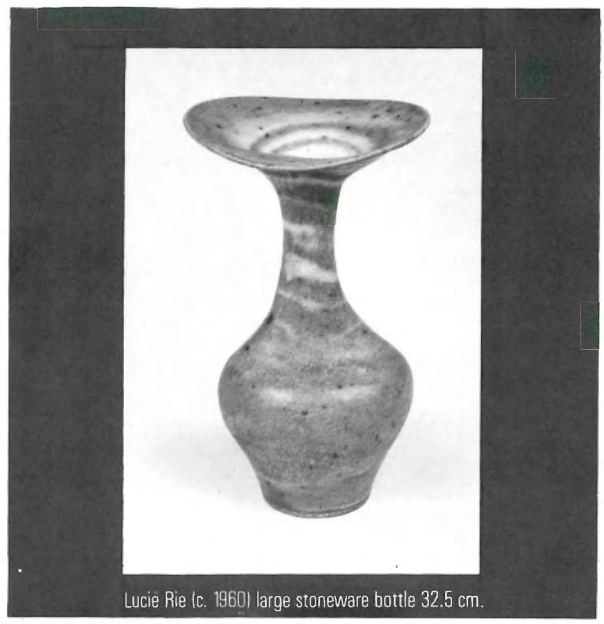

Lucie Rie (c. 1960) large stoneware bottle 32.5 cm.

By appointment only *212 410-4918*

Chicago International Art Exposition

MAY 9-13, 1985
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LIZBETH STEWART
RECENT WORK

NOVEMBER 9–DECEMBER 30, 1984
PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS
MORRIS GALLERY
BROAD AND CHERRY STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19102
LIZBETH STEWART IS REPRESENTED BY THE HELEN DRUTT GALLERY, PHILADELPHIA.

"CAT AND GLOVES" 1983
HANDBUILT LOW-FIRE CLAY, GLAZE, CHINA PAINTS
26½" x 20" x 16"

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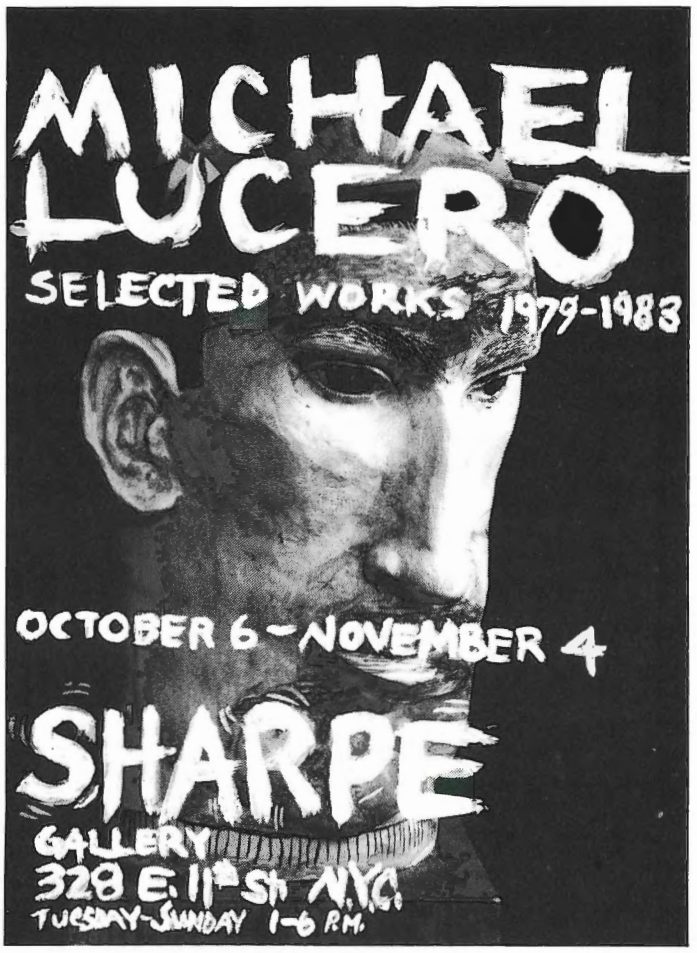
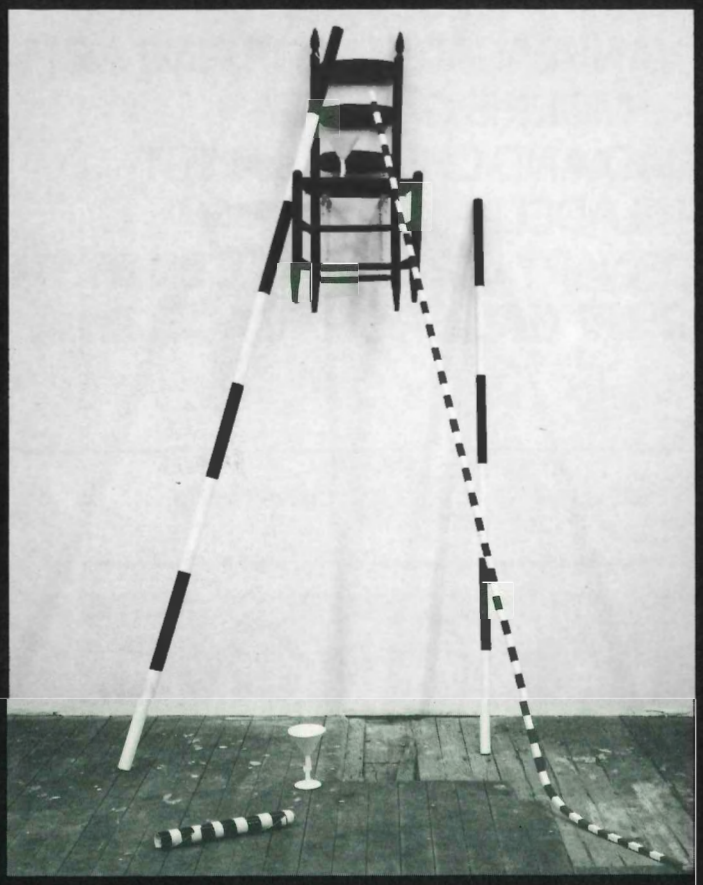
For further information: Patricia Doran, Program in Artisanry, Dept AMF-4, Boston University, 620 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215. 617/353-2022.



CLAY SCULPTURE

ROSS/FARRELL

OCTOBER 12–NOVEMBER 9



Katherine L. Ross, "Vault" (1984), 10′ x 6′ x 4′, clay & wood.

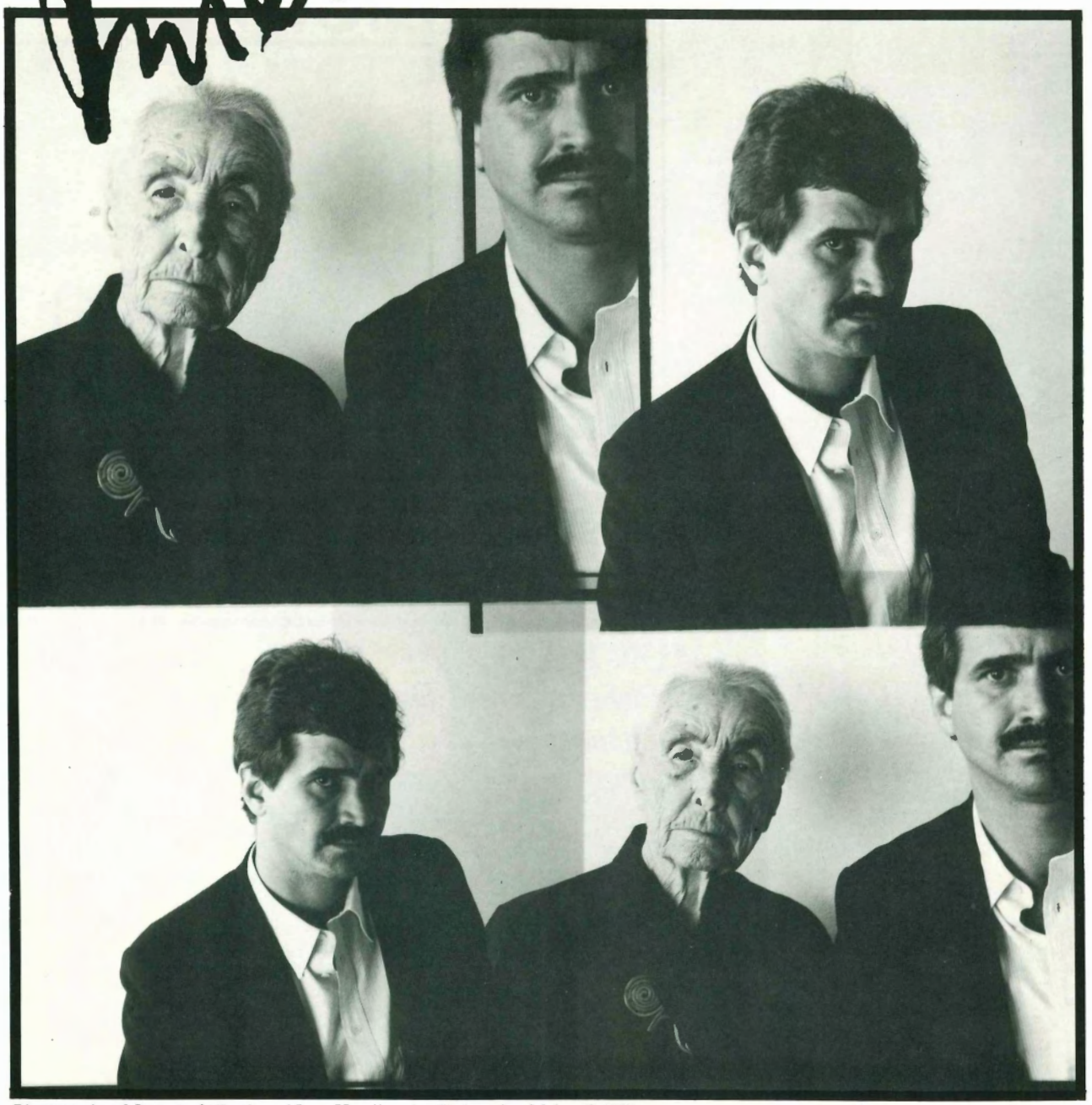
Bill Farrell, "An Affair with Setters and Leaners I" (1984), 48″ x 48″, clay, found objects & rubber.

A. Montgomery Ward Gallery
The University of Illinois at Chicago
750 S. Halsted Street
312/966-8622

Gallery catalog available on request.
Monday–Friday: 11am–6pm;
Saturday: 1–5pm

Ross and Farrell are members of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Interview®



Photographs of Georgia O'Keefe and Juan Hamilton by Christopher Makos © 1983

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